

# HOME CINEMA

HIGH-PERFORMANCE SOUND & VISION

## Choice

**REVEALED:**  
The scariest  
horror film  
franchises



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Premium projector  
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**40-42in Group Test**

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Quadral Aurum 5.1  
Kaleidescape movie server  
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**+**

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- THE WALKING DEAD
- HUMMINGBIRD
- LIFEFORCE ■ GTA V

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TOP TEN GEAR GUIDE → DESIGNER SKY BOXES → SONY'S NEW SOUNDBAR

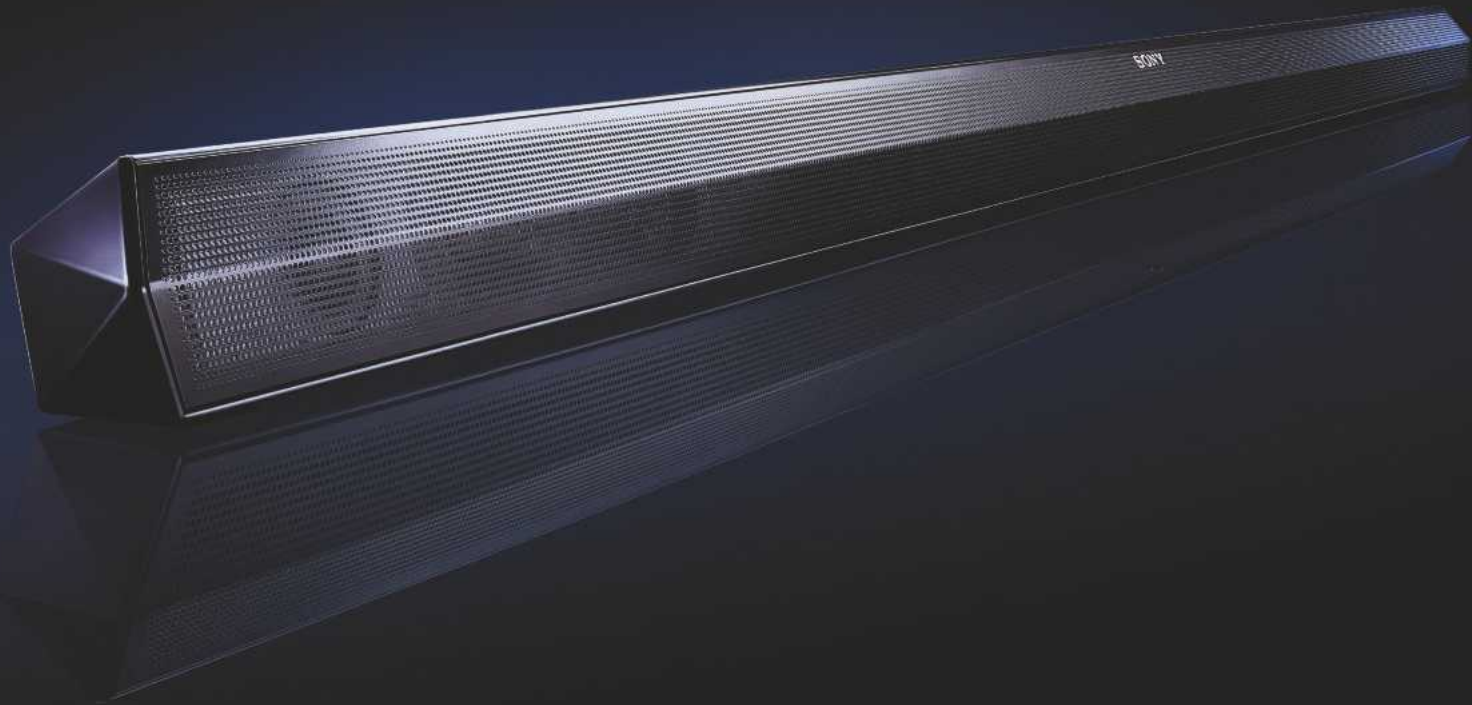
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# HOME CINEMA Choice

www.homecinemachoice.com

## EDITORIAL TEAM

**Editor** Mark Craven  
mark.craven@homecinemachoice.com  
**Deputy Editor** Anton van Beek  
anton.vanbeek@homecinemachoice.com  
**Art Editor** John Rook

## CONTRIBUTORS

Richard Stevenson, Adrian Justins, Steve May, John Archer, Adam Rayner, Tekura Maeva, Martin Pipe, Grant Rennell, Ed Selley

**Photography** Mike Prior, Claire Collins

## ADVERTISING

**Senior Advertising Executive** Jo Holmes  
Tel: 01689 869 919  
E-mail: joanna.holmes@homecinemachoice.com

## MARKETING AND SUBSCRIPTIONS

UK: New, Renewals and Enquiries  
Tel: 0844 543 8200  
E-mail: mytimemedia@subscription.co.uk  
USA & CANADA: New, Renewals and Enquiries  
(001) 877 363 1310  
E-mail: expressmag@expressmag.com  
REST OF WORLD: New, Renewals and Enquiries  
Tel: +44 (0) 1689 869 896  
**BACK ISSUES**  
Tel: 0844 848 8822  
From outside UK: +44 (0) 2476 322234  
Email: customer.services@myhobbystore.com  
www.myhobbystore.co.uk

## MANAGEMENT TEAM

**Group Editor** Paul Miller, paul.miller@avtechmedia.co.uk  
**Group Sales Manager** Duncan Armstrong  
**Head of Design and Production** Julie Miller  
**Chief Executive** Owen Davies  
**Chairman** Peter Harkness

## Published by MyTimeMedia Ltd

Hadlow House, 9 High Street, Green Street Green,  
Orpington, Kent, BR6 6BG  
Tel: 0844 412 2262  
From outside the UK: +44 (0) 1689 869 840

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If you don't want to miss an issue



IFA show report, p24

# WELCOME

The passing of Ray Dolby in September was a sad moment for home cinema fans – we've all enjoyed multichannel movie soundtracks thanks, in a large part, to his passion and technological expertise.



Yet at the same time I was cheered by the reaction from the mainstream press, which gave him considerable coverage and praise, especially as the same mainstream press had reported from the IFA tech show but only seemed to be concerned with Samsung's Galaxy Gear 'smart' watch.

**IFA this year was a cracker, packed to the rafters with 4K/Ultra HD technology**, a new HDMI specification,

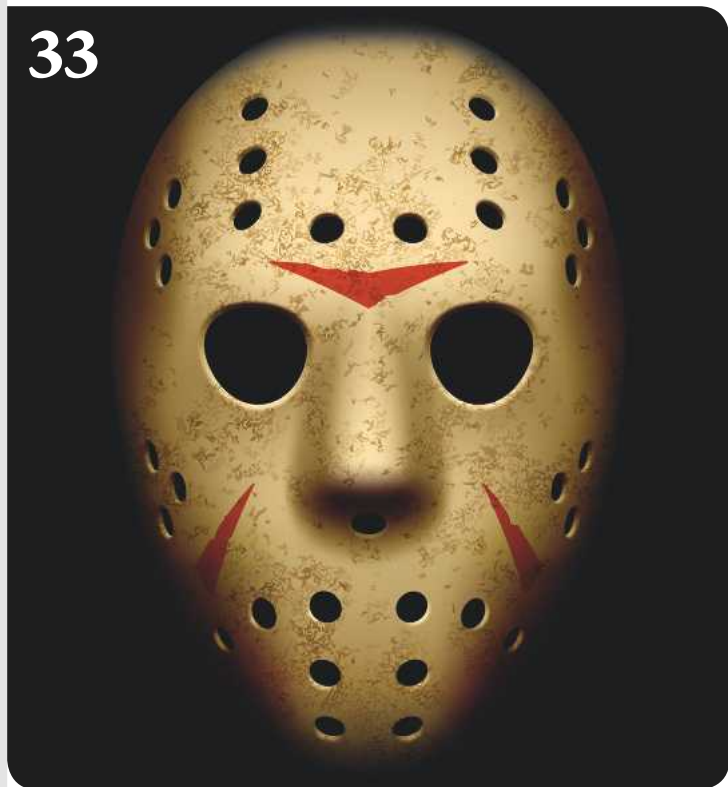
innovative audio solutions and intriguing words from the Blu-ray Disc Association. A watch that links your phone/tablet is certainly a neat idea, but it was the home cinema hardware that bears Ray Dolby's imprint that really got my blood pumping.

*Mark Craven*  
Editor



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## CONTRIBUTORS



**John Archer:**  
The UK's most experienced TV tester cut his teeth as an early HCC staffer



**Richard Stevenson:**  
Industry veteran and former Editor of UK CE trade journal ERT



**Steve May:**  
HCC's former Editor-in-Chief is one of the UK's most respected AV journo



**Martin Pipe:**  
Technical expert Martin is renowned throughout the home cinema industry



**Adam Rayner:**  
The UK's foremost expert in extreme audio writes about bass, hi-fi and, er, cartoons



**Adrian Justins:**  
Made his name as the editor of *What Video & TV* and *What Home Cinema*

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# Redefining Excellence

The new JVC projector line boasts the industry's highest native and dynamic contrast, the DLA-X900R delivers a native contrast ratio of 1,500,000:1

JVC's 2014 projectors are DLA-X900R, DLA-X700R and DLA-X500R.

All models are 3D-enabled and offer 4k e-shift3.

The projectors equipped with 4k e-shift3, the latest iteration of the company's e-shift technology, features a 4k signal input (60p) so that now both 4k and 2k sources can be displayed as 3840 x 2160 images.

Highest level of quality and performance

# JVC

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[www.jvc.co.uk](http://www.jvc.co.uk)



# BULLETIN

→ **NEWS HIGHLIGHTS** SONY Slinky soundbar sets out to show that good things come in small packages **CRESTRON** Is the age of home automation really dead? **SKY** Satcaster pledges ongoing support for 3D **PMC** Exploring the science of speakers **NEWS X10** The hottest news in bite-size chunks **ALAN PARTRIDGE: ALPHA PAPA** A-ha! Comedy smash heading to DVD and BD **AND MUCH MORE!**

## Dressed to impress

Sky+HD limited edition 2TB box → [www.sky.com/designerboxes](http://www.sky.com/designerboxes)



Want to make your system look that little bit more 'on trend'? Then check out this latest designer collection of limited edition Sky+HD 2TB set-top boxes with built-in Wi-Fi. Available from mid-November, the STBs feature designs by fashion fiddlers Roland Mouret, Giles Deacon, Sophie Dahl and Kit Neale – each reflecting their favourite TV genres. So, just in case you can't work it out for yourselves, Mouret was inspired by gritty crime dramas, Deacon by classic Disney animation, Dahl by all things romantic and Kit Neale by David Attenborough's nature documentaries.

### HCC ONLINE...

Looking for breaking AV news, blogs, features, & reviews? For your daily fix visit us at [www.homecinemachoice.com](http://www.homecinemachoice.com) Follow us on Twitter @hccmag



# Soundbar on a diet

Sony HT-SC3 → [www.sony.co.uk](http://www.sony.co.uk)



Sony has upped its presence in the growing soundbar market with the release of the HT-ST3, claimed to be the slimmest Bluetooth-enabled 'bar on the planet. Standing just 4cm high, the diminutive HT-ST3 will set you back around £600 and comes complete with a wired twin-driver subwoofer that houses the connections – three HDMI inputs and an ARC HDMI output, plus optical audio inputs. Bluetooth streaming includes AptX; NFC support is also offered for smartphones.



## TV speaker base



Denon is the latest AV manufacturer to try its hand at a speaker pedestal for your TV. The £250 DHT-T100

Speaker Base promises to accommodate 'most' screens up to 50in and uses two 5in oval-shaped midbass drivers and a pair of 0.5in tweeters, married to what Denon will only say is a 'powerful digital amplifier'. The rear of the unit sports two bass reflex ports. The sonic slab offers optical, coaxial and analogue phono hook-ups and features Bluetooth audio streaming with aptX support. [www.denon.co.uk](http://www.denon.co.uk)

## HK unveils new AVR



With its £500 price tag, Harman

Kardon has positioned its new entry-level AVR 171 receiver to take on the likes of Pioneer's VSX-923 and Onkyo's TX-NR626. The 7.2-channel model boasts built-in Bluetooth, Airplay, vTuner internet radio and DLNA audio streaming – although a wired Ethernet connection is required as Wi-Fi isn't present. Other features include 4K passthrough, smart control via a free iOS/Android app, six-in/two-out HDMI connectivity and a new Natural Sound Processing mode. [uk.harmankardon.com](http://uk.harmankardon.com)

## Anniversary speakers



Artcoustic is celebrating its 15th anniversary this year, and has announced an

extremely limited run of a special anniversary edition of its Target SL line of on-wall speakers. Just 15 pairs of Target SL 15th Anniversary Edition speakers are being produced in three new colours – Haven Light Blue, Mulberry Beige and Jet Black – with each model featuring a brushed silver logo on the side, plus a signed and numbered declaration on the reverse. The speakers will be available from November, priced £1,000 per pair. [www.artcoustic.com](http://www.artcoustic.com)

# Crestron hails tech lifestyle

You don't have to have what we do, but you'll want it, says brand chief

The age of home automation is dead, but an era of lifestyle electronics is just beginning. That was the message from Crestron chief operating officer Randy Klein at the opening of the company's new London lifestyle showroom.

Located in the Chelsea Harbour Design Centre, the venue places Crestron's control technologies into an upmarket lifestyle setting which features everything from kitchen to boardroom office.

In the plush showroom, a swish lounge doubles as a full-blown home theatre. Inside, a 65in TV lurks unseen behind the sliding doors of bespoke cabinetry; one touch on the Crestron touchpanel, and doors slide back to reveal the screen. When TV just doesn't hit the spot, one key press hides the TV and a drop-down 110in screen descends, synced to a ceiling lift supporting a JVC D-ILA projector.

Naturally, all the speakers are hidden, as are the source components. The Blu-ray player, set-top boxes and games consoles are all squirrelled away in the racks. Lighting dims in anticipation. 'People think of



**Robin van Meeuwen:** 'It's not you adjusting to technology. It's more about technology adapting to your needs'

Crestron as a maker of remote controls, but one of our most exciting product developments is shades,' says Klein. 'Automated shades immediately transform a room. It's our duty to educate consumers about this kind of technology, to show them that it's not scary or troublesome.'

Home cinema in the showroom is handled by Crestron's own surround sound processor and amplification. There's also a multiroom Sonnex audio system feeding the brand's in-wall Aspire and Essence architectural speakers. With their painted zero-bezel grilles, they're discreet in the extreme.

## Lifestyle technology

Vice President of Crestron International, Robin van Meeuwen, told *HCC*: 'Home automation has become an over-used term. It just tends to mean an intelligent house. But we don't sell intelligent houses, we sell technology that adjusts to your lifestyle. It's not you adjusting to technology. It's more about it adapting to your needs.'

Unsurprisingly, van Meeuwen owns a fully-enabled Crestron house. 'Do I have to have it? Probably not,' he admits. 'But do I want it? Yes! Because it makes my home a special place. I don't use it to monitor my energy bill, but I have an app on my smartphone which allows me to see my house. I can turn the lights on, so that the house feels welcoming before I'm home, and I can turn the temperature up when it's cold outside. This is what lifestyle electronics are all about.'

**Crestron's London showroom features a stealth cinema**



## PLAYLIST...

Team *HCC* spins up its disc picks of the month

### Iron Man 3 (All-region BD)

Maybe not the best Marvel superhero film to date – but *IM3* is definitely the smartest and funniest. As you'd expect, it also looks and sounds stellar on BD



### Star Trek Into Darkness (All-region BD)



When this Blu-ray's Dolby TrueHD 7.1 mix is let off its leash, it's the closest you'll get to experiencing intergalactic travel...

### Bring Me the Head of Machine Gun Woman (Region B BD)



A gory and crazy ride into the heart of grindhouse cinema courtesy of its gun-toting, lingerie-clad star

### X-COM: Enemy Unknown (Xbox 360/PS3/PC)



The disappointment of *The Bureau: X-COM Declassified* sent us back to its flawless turn-based predecessor

### Scary Stories (R2 DVD)



Volume four of the BFI's *Children's Film Foundation Collection* features a trio of chillers from the '70s and '80s. Spooky fun for all the family!

## LOADING...

Team HCC's pick of the hottest BD and DVD news

## Hi-def fright-fest



Horror fans can look forward to a little festive fear this December when Warner Home Video unleashes the year's biggest horror smash, *The Conjuring*, on Blu-ray and DVD. Arriving in the UK on December 9, the Blu-ray promises a DTS-HD Master Audio 5.1 mix and a trio of featurettes – *Conjuring: Face to Face with Terror*, *A Life in Demonology* and *Scaring the '@\$%\*' Out of You*.

## Beware the pod people



Philip Kaufman's '70s remake of *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* will be getting the deluxe BD treatment from Arrow Video on November 18. Extras include a commentary and a new *Making of...* documentary.

## It's the end of the world as you know it



Universal Pictures has announced that Simon Pegg, Nick Frost and Edgar Wright's latest film *The World's End* will be hitting DVD and Blu-ray on November 25. There's no word on extras yet – but judging by the *Shaun of the Dead* and *Hot Fuzz* discs, expect plenty!

## Sport drives innovation at Sky

Satcaster discusses its latest TV tech and reaffirms commitment to 3D

Satellite broadcaster Sky has pledged continued support for 3D, while aggressively developing interactive mobile platforms and stepping up 4K/ Ultra HD trials.

'Our vision, from the moment you wake up until the time you go to bed, is to be the service you turn to first,' says Dave Gibbs, head of digital media. 'From Twitter to the living room,' he says 'the aim is to be relevant to the screen subscribers find themselves with and the context they're in.' During a behind-the-scenes tour of Sky Sports, he told HCC that it was sport, more than any other genre, that is driving TV technology forward.

Mobile users have been early beneficiaries of new innovation. Sky Go, the satcaster's companion app, has around 3.5m regular users and continues to be subject to rapid development. Footie fans can catch the channel's Saturday night Match Choice highlights programme on their Sky Sports app, while Sky Sports 360 enables viewers to revisit goals from different camera angles. 'Mobile users are now getting the same match data as the Sky commentary team,' reveals Gibbs.

## From 3D to 4K

Sky was an early pioneer of 3D broadcasting, and while it may no longer be in fashion, director of Sky Sports Production Steve Smith says the number of goggle-wearing viewers is increasing.

'We have more 3D viewers than ever before,' Smith reveals. 'The regular audience for our 3D channel is now around half a million. So we're not scaling back at all. As we've opened up our 3D



**Steve Smith:** 'We're still only at the beginning of 3D technology, pushing the boundaries of what it can deliver'

channel to movies, entertainment and sport, the only question is how we serve those three different audiences.' Smith states that the volume of 3D football the station is producing is comparable to that of previous seasons.

While the producer wouldn't be drawn on a 4K/ Ultra HD service launch, he admits to being excited by the technology. 'We're evaluating it, to see where we can get involved,' he says.

Director Tony Mills, who was also responsible for shooting Sky's first ever football match and has since directed over 2,000 games, told HCC that 4K fundamentally changes how sports look on TV. 'The extra resolution means you don't need to keep cutting to big close-ups. You can see the emotion on a player's face from a distance.'



Sky Sports 360 (left) lets you switch between camera angles



## Tannoy upgrades Mercury speakers

Manufacturer injects its affordable speaker range with a 'raft' of enhancements

Building on the success of its fifth-generation Mercury V line-up, Tannoy has introduced a major update to its best-selling loudspeaker range.

Dubbed the Mercury Vi series, its most notable difference over the previous Mercury Vs is the employment of an all-new magnesium-aluminium alloy tweeter, which replaces the soft fabric unit. Tannoy says this beefs up high-frequency performance by extending the frequency range to 53kHz and pushing HF breakup to inaudible levels. A new crossover has also been implemented,

using the brand's own Differential Material Technology (DMT) to provide a better integration between the tweeter and the pulp fibre midbass driver.

The four-strong Mercury Vi series consists of the Vli standmount (£150/pair), V4i floorstander (£430/pair), VCi centre channel (£140) and VRi slim-profile wall-mountable surround speaker (£140/pair). A £1,000 5.1 package is also available, matching the V4i, Vli and VCi with a TS2.10 300W subwoofer.

The cabinets are available in either sugar maple or dark walnut finishes.







**Him:** "I wonder if she's free later?"

**Her:** "I wonder when he's going to invite me to hear his REL T-7? I hear it goes down to 28Hz and really brings a system alive."

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## DIARY

Our calendar ensures that you don't miss out...

## → OCTOBER



**21: Curse of Chucky**  
Following its European premiere at August's FrightFest in London, the sixth instalment in the *Child's Play* franchise gets a DVD and Blu-ray release in the UK.  
[www.universalpictures.co.uk](http://www.universalpictures.co.uk)

**28: Doctor Who: The Complete Series 7**

Matt Smith's final series as the Doctor gets the bumper boxset treatment on DVD and Blu-ray, packed with behind-the-scenes featurettes, episode prequels and other bonus goodies.  
[www.bbcworldwide.com](http://www.bbcworldwide.com)

**29: Gamestick**

Play your favourite Android games in Full HD on your TV courtesy of this dinky new games console. Beating Xbox One and PS4 to the punch, the Gamestick launches worldwide today priced around £80.  
[gamestick.tv](http://gamestick.tv)

**30: Thor: The Dark World**

Phase Two of the Marvel superhero universe continues with this second cinematic outing for Thor. Brave the thunder and lightning to catch it at a multiplex near you in 2D or 3D.  
[www.disney.co.uk](http://www.disney.co.uk)

**31: Halloween**

It's every horror fan's favourite holiday. So what better excuse do you need for enjoying your favourite fright-flicks on Blu-ray?

## → NOVEMBER

**08: Gravity**



Alfonso 'Children of Men' Cuarón directs George Clooney and Sandra Bullock in this 3D thriller about two stranded astronauts. Expect it to pull in plenty of praise as it opens at cinemas across the UK.  
[www.warnerbros.co.uk](http://www.warnerbros.co.uk)

**25: Pacific Rim**

This flick about giant robotic suits battling equally huge monsters was clearly tailor-made for home cinema – and as of today you'll be able to pick it up on DVD, BD and 3D BD.  
[www.warnerbros.co.uk](http://www.warnerbros.co.uk)

**14: HCC #228**

Your favourite home cinema magazine hits the stands today, packed with hardware tests, features, outspoken opinion and in-depth software reviews.  
[www.homecinemachoice.com](http://www.homecinemachoice.com)

# The science of speakers

PMC and the National Physical Lab team up for Fact-finding mission

Speaker manufacturers have often used scientific methods to aid product design. Computer modelling and holography, which helps assess the behaviour of drivers and different materials, are stock weapons. Yet PMC, in conjunction with the National Physical Laboratory (NPL) in Teddington, has gone a step further with a technique known as Rapid Acousto-Optic Scanning (RAOS).

PMC and the NPL came together when PMC founder and chief design engineer Peter Thomas, discovered a page buried in the NPL website inviting private-sector organisations to collaborate with scientists on the possible commercial applications of RAOS.

'NPL had been developing RAOS for use at ultrasound frequencies in liquid,' NPL research scientist Richard Jackett told *HCC*, 'but we wondered if it would also work in air at ultrasound frequencies. With a small modification to the method it did, so our attention moved to the audible frequency range. When that also worked we knew we had something really cool, but it needed a good engineering application to demonstrate its power. Luckily for us PMC had the right application in mind. Together we have refined RAOS into a powerful diagnostic tool.'

While conventional loudspeaker measurement techniques use mics in an anechoic chamber, RAOS uses lasers. 'It hinges,'



**Richard Jackett:** 'We knew we had something really cool, but needed a good application to demonstrate its power'

explains PMC design engineer Oliver Thomas (Peter's son), 'on the fact that the changing pressure of soundwaves has a tiny effect on the density and temperature (and thus the optical refractive index) of the air that carries them.' Therefore, when the light of a laser passes through these soundwaves, the changes in refractive index will have an effect on its path and speed. When the beam returns, the differences relative to the laser's outgoing beam result in what's

known as an interference pattern. These changes of air pressure due to the speaker's operation can then be detected by NPL's PSV-400 scanning vibrometer.

## A matter of Fact

Peter Thomas immediately saw how NPL's discovery could be used to assess how a loudspeaker – including the effects of baffles and grilles – was behaving. A better picture of a prototype speaker's performance could be built up than had been achievable with traditional driver-focused laser measurements. Before long PMC got in touch with NPL and began collaborating on a practical testing system, using the vast double-isolated anechoic chamber at Teddington.

*HCC* was given a demo of the process.

The PSV-400 lurked in a corner of the chamber, firing its laser past the front of the speaker. This reflects from the opposite corner, back towards the PSV-400 and its sensor. The laser therefore passes through the speaker's sound pressure waves twice – the system takes account of this. Multiple measurements are collected from different trajectories – some 2,500 in fact, although even more can be done, to create a more detailed picture, if the time allows.

Proprietary software then assimilates all the raw data, turning it into a video file that actually shows the soundwaves moving – albeit 'slowed down' – to enable the development engineer to see what's going on. Any problems can be rectified, and subsequent modifications to the speaker's design tested. The current system works best at 500Hz or above, although PMC and the NPL are refining the system to cover lower frequencies.

PMC's first product to be developed with the aid of this process is the Fact.12 (pictured above), a floorstanding speaker with an audiophile price tag of around £12,000 per pair. However, while PMC is – quite rightly – the first manufacturer to exploit the technology, RAOS available to everyone.



The National Physical Laboratory's double-isolated anechoic chamber



This month's top 10 news stories in handy, bite-sized chunks...



## 1 Look good, hear better

Geomarc Telecom, a leader in the design and manufacture of assistive devices for the deaf and hard of hearing has launched a new wireless TV headset that promises to 'put style firmly back on the agenda for anyone with hearing loss.' The smart-looking Geomarc CL7400 retails for around £130 and offers balance control for different levels of loss in different ears; tone control for high/low frequency hearing loss (+/-10db); an operating range of up to 50m; and 8-hour rechargeable battery life.

## 2 BT Sports app hits milestone

It may have got off to a slightly shaky start due to technical problems that left thousands of users unable to log-in during the first game of the Premier League Season, but the BT Sports app will pass one million downloads any day now. The app allows BT customers to watch its three new sports channels on mobile devices.

## 3 Sky scores 4K goal

Sky has broadcast the UK's first live event in 4K/Ultra HD. The satcaster's research and development teams successfully filmed the West Ham vs Stoke City match on August 31 and transmitted the whole match live over satellite through its Studio facility. 'We continue to test and learn so that we're ready as and when the market for Ultra HD begins to develop,' said a spokesperson for Sky.

## 4 Xbox One release date

Microsoft has officially announced that its £430 next-generation Xbox One console will hit retail in the UK and 12 other markets on November 22. It also claims to have increased the console's CPU from 1.6GHz to 1.75GHz.

## 5 Virgin inks deal with Netflix

Virgin Media TiVo users will soon have access to Netflix's on-demand and movie content via a dedicated set-top box app, thanks to a tie-up between the two companies. The Netflix app will roll-out to all 1.7 million TiVo subscribers by the end of the year.

## 6 Paving the way for 4K BD?

Optical disc replication specialist Singulus Technologies has announced the launch of its BLULINE III replication line, designed to enable the production of triple-layer Blu-ray discs. The system uses a new data compression method that is claimed to increase storage per disc-layer from 25GB to 33GB, giving a total capacity of 100GB. Could this be the first indication of how 4K content will be delivered to our homes?

## 7 Crime does pay after all

Videogame blockbuster *GTA V* (see p100) has smashed the record books, selling more than \$800million worth of copies in its first 24 hours on sale. To put that into context, the previous record holder, *Call of Duty: Black Ops II* racked up a mere \$500million in its first 24 hours.

## 8 Projectors big in China

China is now the largest projector market in the world according to the latest findings released by high-tech market data specialist PMA Research. China overtook the US last year with annual sales of 1.8million projectors, compared to the 1.6million units sold Stateside.

## 9 Nintendo legend dies

Former Nintendo president Hiroshi Yamauchi passed away in September. Having run the company from 1949 to 2002, Mr Yamauchi is credited with transforming the former trading card company into one of the most recognisable and successful names in gaming.

## 10 LoveFilm gets animated

Amazon-owned LoveFilm has signed a content deal with Warner Bros International Television Distribution to bring an extensive library of animated content to the LoveFilm Instant streaming service. The deal includes more than 15 years' worth of animated Batman adventures, from *Batman: The Animated Series* to *Batman: The Brave and the Bold*, plus *Superman: The Animated Series*, *Justice League* and both the original and 2011 version of *Thundercats*.



## PREMIERE

What's happening in the world of TV and films...

### The dead keep walking

AMC is developing a spin-off from its hit TV series *The Walking Dead*. AMC president Charlie Collier says the new show will use 'an entirely new story and cast of characters' to provide 'another unforgettable view of the zombie apocalypse.'

### More Marvel for TV



Following the success of *Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.*, rumours are rife that ABC is already developing another TV series set in the Marvel universe. The scuttlebutt says that the new series will be a spin-off from the *Agent Carter* short that was on the *Iron Man 3* Blu-ray.

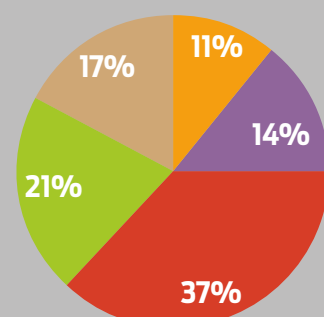
### 'Abandon all hope...'

*Evil Dead* director Fede Alvarez has been tapped by Universal to helm its movie adaptation of the 2010 videogame *Dante's Inferno*. As you've probably guessed, the game was based on the first part of Dante Alighieri's epic poem *The Divine Comedy*, but recasts the narrator as a kick-ass demon-slaying knight.

## WE ASKED...

How much did you spend on your current speaker setup?


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# 'I am Siege-Face'

Alan Partridge: Alpha Papa  
→ StudioCanal → Region B BD/R2 DVD



A-ha! The triumphant bigscreen debut of Steve Coogan's Alan Partridge is arriving on Blu-ray and DVD on December 2. *Alan Partridge: Alpha Papa* sees Norfolk's finest disc jockey taken hostage by psychopathic colleague Pat Farrell (Colm Meaney) – cue action, chat and a day-trip to Cromer Pier. Both disc releases pack a fan-pleasing selection of extra features, including a 30-minute *Making of...*, deleted scenes, outtakes and an audio commentary by Coogan and writing duo Rob Coogan and Neil Gibbons.



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# Ray Dolby:

## a pioneer of home cinema

**Martin Pipe** pays tribute to an industry legend whose technical innovations revolutionised our relationship with sound

**RAY DOLBY'S DEATH** from leukaemia on September 12 made international headlines, courtesy of his inestimable contributions to audio. However, his career started out in video – specifically the world's first practical videotape recorder. In the mid-1950s, he held a consultancy role with Ampex during the development of Quadruplex VTRs. These enormous beasts, launched in 1956, were a broadcast mainstay for over 20 years. VTRs revolutionised a TV industry that until then had been reliant on film and live transmissions, and eventually what we watched at home. It was a harbinger of things to come.

After earning degrees from both Stanford and Cambridge, the Portland-born engineer headed to London where, in 1965, he founded Dolby Laboratories. At that time, all audio tape was analogue. One of its drawbacks was noise, which could degrade studio recording. Increasing the number of tracks (eventually 24 on 2in tape) meant that they became narrower – and noise increased as a result. Furthermore, sophisticated productions usually involved several dubs – and generation-noise increased as a result.

Dolby Labs' solution was a four-band 'companding' noise reduction system that eventually became known as Dolby A. Compressing an audio-signal's dynamic range kept quieter moments above the noise floor. During playback, the dynamic range was expanded correspondingly to recreate the

original audio. Dolby A made its debut in the studios of Decca, with its classical output ably demonstrating noise reduction's benefits, and became an industry standard. Twenty years later, an improved version (Spectral Recording, or SR) was introduced.

Ray Dolby's next project was a 'simplified' noise reduction system. Known as Dolby B, it was built into quality cassette decks from

**'As manufacturers released domestic Dolby Surround decoders, the home cinema revolution began in earnest'**

the early 1970s. Cassette's narrow-tracks and slow speeds cried out for noise-reduction, and Dolby B helped to transform what was a dictation medium into one of hi-fi potential. Record companies released 'Dolbyed' cassettes, and the success of these – along with the licence fees paid by hardware manufacturers – boosted Dolby Lab's coffers. Subsequent developments (C and S) were also successful.

And so to Dolby and film. The first use of a Dolby technology came with the 1971 release

of Stanley Kubrick's controversial drama *A Clockwork Orange*. There, Dolby A kept noise at bay during the film's production stages. 1974's thriller *Callan* was the first film harnessing Dolby to reduce the noise of optical prints in cinemas. But in 1975 came the real breakthrough. At that time, there was a quadraphonic (four-channel) fad in the hi-fi world. Consumers didn't appreciate the costs, (usually) lacklustre results and extra speakers; it flopped.

Dolby however realised that multichannel audio could enhance the cinematic experience. It had been tried before, with multichannel magnetic-stripping, but never caught on. And so he developed what became known as Dolby Stereo. Buried in the left/right channels were encoded a centre (dialogue/effects) channel, and a surround 'ambience' channel. They were decoded by a Dolby processor, and drove the additional speakers. The first films to employ Dolby Stereo were Ken Russell's *Lisztomania* (1975) and the 1976 Barbra Streisand vehicle *A Star Is Born*. What really showed it off, though, was 1977's *Star Wars*. Within a decade, 6,000 cinemas worldwide were Dolby-equipped.

Then came home video. Although initially mono, later VCRs were equipped with stereo audio, and Laserdisc was also stereo-enabled. It was discovered that the Dolby Stereo soundtracks of movies offered for sale or rental were preserved intact, and some

## MEMORIES OF DOLBY

The industry honours a sorcerer of sound

### George Lucas, director:

'Ray's pioneering work in sound played a pivotal role in allowing *Star Wars* to be the truly immersive experience I had always dreamed it would be.'

### Mickey Hart, The Grateful Dead:

'Think of all the music you have heard in your lifetime, all the pleasure and comfort given your ears, your spirit. With clarity, Ray brought the sound that we musicians created to people all around the world. He loved good sound.'

### Philip Kaufman, director:

'Dolby's work changed the way movies were made, because sound became a powerful artistic element, and you could do things with sound that had never been done before.'

Sources: Dolby, *The San Francisco Chronicle*

### Ben Burt, Sound Designer:

'Here we have a scientist who invents tools for the artist. And so you get the blend of the two important cornerstones of entertainment, which is science and creativity. The result is a whole new frontier is opened.'





Ray Dolby's established  
Dolby Labs in London  
in 1965

manufacturers (notably Yamaha and Lexicon) marketed domestic 'Dolby Surround' decoders. The home cinema revolution had begun. Soon came an improved variant, Pro-Logic, with better channel separation. THX tweaked the standard; meanwhile, some TV programmes were made with Dolby Stereo.

Dolby wasn't resting on his laurels. In 1992, the fruits of his next endeavour astonished

anyone who saw *Batman Returns* as director Tim Burton intended. It was the first movie to use Dolby Digital ('AC-3'), the first discrete 5.1 audio system. Domestic decoders came four years later, along with modified Laserdiscs. Lossy AC-3, implemented by the DVD and HDTV standards, is still with us today, although as the newer Blu-ray format demanded something better, the 24-bit Dolby

TrueHD lossless standard was devised. Since then, Dolby Labs has also enhanced Pro-Logic to include height channels, and introduced discrete 7.1 audio into cinemas, as well as the next-gen Dolby Atmos surround format currently crying out for more cinema support. The groundbreaking work of Ray Dolby continues, even though he has sadly passed ■



*Batman Returns*  
debuted Dolby Digital



*Star Wars* was the posterboy  
for Dolby Stereo



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If you are hunting for a largescale sound to fill a large cinema room, then Quadral's flagship Aurum Titan range might be just the ticket. But you'll need a large bank balance, too...

**QUADRAL, A GERMAN** loudspeaker brand with a deliciously Teutonic approach to engineering, has been selling its top-flight speaker line for some time. So much so, that its flagship Aurum Titan floorstander – named after gold (Au) in the periodic table of elements – is now into its eighth iteration. Simply put, these are as good a speaker as Quadral currently offers, and their approach showcases a fantastically rare grasp of both ends of the audio spectrum.

While only a few speaker manufacturers specialise in sub-bass systems that can make you experience fear by profundity and pressure alike, and some produce speakers with the most breathtakingly realistic and clear high-frequency extension and control, it's not often you find a brand that is brilliant at both. In some cases, this is due to the different requirements of the hi-fi industry influencing the product. For, despite the use of cannon in Tchaikovsky's legendary *1812 Overture*, speakers made mainly for music simply do not need to recreate the sound of a million dollars' worth of hydrocarbons going boom in *Tropic Thunder*. Quadral's flagship array, however, aims to deliver across the entire frequency range, and suit both hi-fi and home cinema fans alike.

#### Let's talk tweeters

This multichannel system can be yours for approximately £25,000. That's hardly pocket-change, but you do get so much for your money.

Firstly, all the cabinets (bar the subwoofer, of course) bear wonderful tweeter technology. Very subtly different from front to back, yet equally impressive. Ribbon tweeters always make me quiver with anticipation.

On the Aurum Titan VIII floorstander and the Base Titan VIII centre channel, the tweeter is a 4in-tall folded aluminium ribbon, that looks like ruched fabric, held between two magnetic bars. These, it's fair to say, aren't

cheap to manufacture. The rear speakers in our array, the Montan VIIIs, use a similar tweeter – a magnetostatic isodynamic driver, very much like the old Infinity EMIT (Electro Magnetic Induction Tweeter). Both types reach up to a very respectable 65kHz, which should equate to utter effortlessness in the audible zone, plus the arguable benefits for overtones and 'unheard' ultrasonic harmonics that users of super-tweeters will speak in favour of.

Both the large Titans VIIIs – and they are awfully imposing, weighing a substantial 88kg each – and the equally chunky centre channel employ a regular-looking 6.5in midband unit. Looks can be deceptive,

**'This array offers no few than eight 10in drivers– whichever way you look at it, that's a lot of low-end'**

though. This is a highly developed proprietary cast-chassis driver fashioned from an exotic cone material called ALTIMA. An alloy of aluminium, titanium and magnesium, it should really be called Altimg, but that isn't as snappy. Quadral alone is licensed to use this, and it's designed to offer properties of stiffness, lightness, and rapid thermal dissipation.

#### Bass by the bucket-load

The same material is used for Quadral's proprietary 10in drivers – and there are eight of these across the five speakers in the system. Whichever way you look at it, that's a lot of low-end, even before you consider the subwoofer: eight 10in cones should ensure a hefty sound pressure level.

Furthermore, as well as being ported to the rear

Don't try and install these in a regular living room...



**Adam Rayner** has been writing about speakers for *HCC* since the very first issue – but only recently admitted that he has a subwoofer in his bedroom





from a cleverly back-swollen enclosure (in order to show a narrower front panel to the world), these bass drivers are front-loaded, too. It may not look like much, but on the centre and the towers, the 10in cones sit within a little 'cave'. This is enough to acoustically support the drivers some more and the benefit is a richer, warmer bass with greater power.

Both the Titan VIII and Base Titan VIII have a +2dB/-2dB passive crossover switch system on the back, next to their paired binding posts, for room tuning. The Montan speaker, however, doesn't, and feels like more of a purist stereo product. Although

## 'The scale and sheer weight of the Titans' lower ranges is matched by a superb treble detailing'

Quadral is happy to partner these with the Titan floorstanders, those looking for a more compact surround speaker might want to investigate the standmount Altan VIII. As well as its ribbon tweeter and Altima drivers, the Montan's standout design element is the alignment of its bass driver, angled inwards in what Quadral describes as a pressure chamber/reflex configuration. A benefit of this is that it allows the Montan to have a slimmer front baffle.

### Getting down to it

Performing LFE duties in this package is the brand's Orkus R subwoofer. It uses a ported enclosure, 500W amplifier and a downward-firing 12in long-throw (24mm) driver. Connections include a balanced XLR input for high-end setups, and it sports a neat design, with a metal faceplate bearing its name.

Off all the speakers, the Orkus R is perhaps the least imposing. You cannot hope to accommodate this six-strong lineup sensibly in anything other than a dedicated – and large – cinema room. Big and vaguely beautiful, they can be ordered in two shades of oak, plus cherry, gloss black, white or even custom lacquer finishes. Our system was supplied with the Montan VIIIs in Oak Nature real-wood flavour.

This is yet another array (like Bowers & Wilkins' Diamond series) that required me to leave my own demo room and head elsewhere for the audition. I just don't have the space to do them justice. The venue, a premium cinema room, was laid on by Birmingham install outfit Home Cinema and Beyond – thanks for the hospitality! I arrived to see the Quadral's ready to



The Titan VIII's bass drivers are made from an aluminium, titanium and magnesium alloy, while its rear panel (top right) allows a sneak peak at the crossover technology; the Montan VIII is dual rear-ported (right)

rock, plumbed into Marantz separates via Chord cabling.

### Ethereal delivery

Why do so many folks adore Celine Dion? I ask because I politely endured a little slice of her warbling before I could reach into my Blu-ray bag for my own material. We stomach her music because of the sheer production excellence her concert material gets – I was immediately in the audience with a perfect level of realism. From the most ethereal, breathy highs that can separate a dozen violins' strings, to an almost impossibly hilariously visceral bass, via that annoyingly perfect soaring voice of hers, the Quadral setup's performance was superb. I found myself wanting to hear more of her, which isn't something I thought possible.

Then I was shown a clip from *Avatar*, the first arrival in the jungle of Pandora, and the

Montan surround speakers woke from their slumber. I know the soundtrack to James Cameron's sci-fi inside out, but have rarely experienced the entire soundscape so detailed and rich. The lemurs running through it from front to back make little catty yelping sounds, and it was easy to hear that some are closer than others.

This is followed by a chase sequence involving a growling beast and frantic crashing and breaking of branches. It was instantly huge and terrifying. I felt the creature's growl deep in my chest and the floor of the room throbbed as a large tree got decimated. Yet it was all delivered with perfect clarity – this is one of the sweetest, richest, high-fidelity systems I have been lucky enough to try.

The Aurums offer a huge, effortless sound. The monstrous scale and unstrained sheer weight to the lows and low midrange is matched by a treble detailing that is





just superb. A Michael Bublé recording (*Another Day*) hammered home the point. The mix was endowed with a great sense of space and I could hear all the production, from the delicate vocal reverb to the applauding audience.

It may be an animated film but *Wreck-It Ralph* is high art as far as I'm concerned – partly because of its fantastic DTS-HD Master Audio soundtrack. I spun the Blu-ray on the Marantz UD7007, beginning with the sequence with Ralph at a support group for videogame bad guys, and as it moved into the action, the film's catchy music oozed up and out of this system with layers I had never heard before. Then onto the land between the games in the Game Central arcade. There's a huge swell in the soundtrack as the characters leaves their game to go and quaff a beer, and this practically lifted me off my comfy recliner.

The Quadral's loved to be played loud and provided a sound that was just enormous all round. When a firework is let off at a birthday party in *Wreck-It Ralph*, it's shot out of the rear right channel, and the Montan VIII sent it flying with breathtaking impact and realism. Floorstanding surround speakers? It could catch on...

As for LFE, well, while I had the Orkus R woofer snuffling around the low frequencies, I wasn't able to tell exactly what it was doing, as it was so well blended and working in addition to the octet of 10in drivers in the other cabinets.

### All-round proposition

Even without the sort of extensive and careful tuning-to-taste that you'd undoubtedly give a system like this, its excellence shone through during my audition. The Quadral's worked well on quite 'normal' (as against exotic) front-end electronics and amplification – their high sensitivity helps – and are beautifully made to offer a real sense of pride in ownership.

Simply put, if you are looking to make a cinema room where a movie's monsters sound terrifyingly real, yet still have its score move you to gentle tears, then these top-end cabinets are one serious proposition. They offer an amazing all-round performance that will impress anyone at any listening level from sensible to apocalyptic, and offer a wonderful, near holosonic ability to place detail and convey emotion.

This is a true reference system of clever design, beautiful execution and, dare I say it, good value for the first-class level of performance it provides. The front floorstanders may be unfeasibly large, and the centre and rears are hardly small, but there's no arguing with the system's sonic delivery ■

The Orkus sub provides a balanced XLR input for compatible processors

### SPECIFICATIONS

#### QUADRAL AURUM TITAN VIII

**DRIVE UNITS:** 1 x aluminium ribbon tweeter; 1 x 6.5in ALTIMA midrange driver; 2 x 10in ALTIMA bass drivers

**ENCLOSURE:** Three-way, with pressure-chamber loaded and ported low-frequency section

**FREQUENCY RESPONSE:** 16Hz-65kHz  
**SENSITIVITY:** 90dB

**POWER HANDLING:** 500W

**DIMENSIONS:** 310(w) x 1,390(h) x 579(d)mm  
**WEIGHT:** 88kg

#### QUADRAL AURUM BASE TITAN VIII

**DRIVE UNITS:** 1 x aluminium ribbon tweeter; 1 x 6.5in ALTIMA midrange driver; 2 x 10in ALTIMA bass drivers

**ENCLOSURE:** Three-way, with pressure-chamber loaded and ported low-frequency section

**FREQUENCY RESPONSE:** 25Hz-65kHz  
**SENSITIVITY:** 90dB

**POWER HANDLING:** 500W

**DIMENSIONS:** 800(w) x 385(h) x 438(d)mm  
**WEIGHT:** 48.5kg

#### QUADRAL AURUM MONTAN VIII

**DRIVE UNITS:** 1 x ribbon tweeter; 1 x 6.5in ALTIMA midrange driver; 1 x 10in ALTIMA bass driver

**ENCLOSURE:** Three-way, with pressure-chamber loaded and ported low-frequency section

**FREQUENCY RESPONSE:** 25Hz-65kHz  
**SENSITIVITY:** 89dB

**POWER HANDLING:** 300W

**DIMENSIONS:** 270(w) x 1120(h) x 448(d)mm  
**WEIGHT:** 40kg

#### QUADRAL AURUM ORKUS R

**DRIVE UNITS:** 1 x proprietary 12in LF driver with paper pulp cone, with 12mm XMAX (long throw of 24mm in all)

**ENCLOSURE:** Ported enclosure with down-firing driver

**FREQUENCY RESPONSE:** 20Hz-200Hz  
**ON BOARD POWER:** 500W RMS

**REMOTE CONTROL:** No

**DIMENSIONS:** 400(w) x 437(h) x 500(d)mm  
**WEIGHT:** 31.6kg

**CONNECTIONS:** Paired phono sockets as L/R input; two passthrough phono outputs; balanced XLR input

### HCC VERDICT



#### Quadral Aurum Titan 5.1

→ £25,000 Approx → [www.quadralgb-ie.co.uk](http://www.quadralgb-ie.co.uk)

→ Tel: 01785 748 446

**HIGHS:** Excellent build quality; heavyweight, full-range sound performance

**LOWS:** Not the easiest cabinets to accommodate; price

**Performance** ★★★★★

**Design** ★★★★★

**Features** ★★★★★

**Overall** ★★★★★



# The IFA show: Getting set for 2014



Europe's biggest AV expo saw the major manufacturers prepare for the new year with new Ultra HD, OLED and curved displays, the BDA talking up the future of Blu-ray and the HDMI specification getting a revamp. **Steve May** and **Mark Craven** report

**THE ANNUAL CES** in Las Vegas, held every January, is traditionally where the major AV stories break, but September's IFA technology show in Berlin is no poor relation. Running since the 1950s, it now claims to be the world's largest consumer electronics event, with attendance regularly reaching over 240,000. Exhibitions cover everything from home cinema and hi-fi hardware to smartphones, digital imaging gear and home appliances, and all the major brands are represented, taking control of segregated

halls that are larger than your local branch of Currys and 10 times busier.

IFA is a barometer of where the AV world is headed. The over-riding theme of this year's tech-fest was Ultra HD, with screens in abundance. 3D, however, was given only a cursory mention – and autostereoscopic (glasses-free) 3D was conspicuous by its absence. And while hi-res audio was a frequent topic of conversation, new Blu-ray decks were hard to find – but there's a probably a good reason for that...





### Sony cuts cost of 4K projection

While LED and DLP projection vendors twiddle their thumbs waiting for Texas Instruments and Epson to develop 4K picture engines, Sony is already onto its second-generation SXRD 4K projector – and amazingly the new 4K/Ultra HD VPL-VW500ES retails for virtually half the price of its bigger brother. Just £8,500 effectively gets you a leading-edge digital cinema. So what's the catch? There doesn't seem to be one.

The VPL-VW500ES offers resolution up to 4,096 x 2,160 and has the same native 4K SXRD panels as its pricier sibling. It's also equipped with an HDMI 2.0 input ready for high-frame rate 4K. While owners wait for native content, a highly-effective Super Resolution 4K Reality Creation picture engine does the job of upscaling Full HD sources. Sony's engineers maintain that the new model is bright enough for use in ambient light, even bestowing Bright Cinema and Bright TV presets, but their effectiveness remains to be seen. We suspect buyers will still choose to deploy it in a dedicated theatre.

The VPL-VW500ES is rated at 1,700 ANSI Lumens with a contrast ratio of 200,000:1. In a darkened IFA demo room, its images sparkled with vibrant dynamics. As with Sony's 4K TV screens, it can handle a wide colour gamut (dubbed Triluminos), and colour fidelity is outstanding. Interestingly, the projector also boasts a Mastered in 4K mode, specifically for use with Sony Pictures' Mastered in 4K Blu-ray releases. This essentially means the projector has exactly the same video filter as that used during the 4K down-conversion process used to replicate the disc.

The projector looks much like the original VPL-VW1000ES, but employs a front-facing air exhaust cooling system. It's a good deal smaller too, and lighter at 14kg, making it more suitable for the average living room. From 4m you'll be able to throw a 120in 4K UHD image. Beneath the hood is a radically redesigned optical block allied to an

all-new, sophisticated plastic and glass element lens. The input terminals have been rationalised, too, but not compromised. There's a pair of HDMI's, plus Ethernet, USB, RS232 and 12V triggers for screen control. It's Active Shutter 3D-capable, but Sony was unable to demonstrate the projector doing its 4K 3D stuff.

All things considered, the VPL-VW500ES represents a seismic shift in the projection market. Rival projector manufacturers now have little choice but to improve their image.



Sony's £8,500 VPL-VW500ES slashes the entry-price for Ultra HD projection

### Samsung's flatscreens go large

TV giant Samsung had probably the busiest area at IFA, and although a lot of that came via gadget fans eager to clap eyes on its new Galaxy mobile



Samsung's 110in Ultra HD TV greeted visitors to the Korean corp's stand



products, including a Smart watch, its lineup of gargantuan TVs drew plenty of admirers.

Crowning the range was a 110in Ultra HD TV that proudly bore the moniker 'World's Largest' – somewhat oddly, as Panasonic's TH-152UX1 plasma, which has been on sale for £600,000 since 2012, is fully 42in bigger.

Joining this pixel-packed behemoth was a 98in model, dubbed a 'large-format display', that is able to be mounted both horizontally or vertically. A video-wall, using three of the screens vertically aligned, proved massively entertaining. Neither pricing nor availability of this model or its 110in stablemate have yet been confirmed – but with Samsung's 85in UHD TV selling for £35,000, you can expect them to be reassuringly expensive.

### Toshiba banks on CEVO power

While Samsung was busy pushing its 4K UHD fleet to ever more preposterous screen sizes, Toshiba was taking a different view. In addition to its already announced 58in, 65in and 84in L9 UHD models, the company previewed a prototype 50in panel. Toshiba's senior product manager Glenn Zanoni told *HCC* that the brand was just courting opinion on the smaller panel. 'Our focus going forward is very much on the 58in model,' he explained. 'That's the sweet spot for us.'

Toshiba has a long history with 4K, actually launching the world's first TV in the form of the ZL2 several IFAs ago, although that model used the extra resolution to support glasses-free 3D. The key thing to look out for with current 4K TVs, Toshiba group manager for visual solution Tasuhiro Nishioka told *HCC*, is the quality of the upscaling.

Nishioka-san likens today's UHD TV thoroughbreds to racing cars. 'The panel represents the tyres,' he says. 'But like a car, if you combine them with a cheap engine the performance will still be bad.'

The 2013 CEVO 4K engine is a logical update of the brand's lauded proprietary Resolution+ picture processing suite. That technology, confides Nishioka, was originally developed to upscale Japanese HD TV,



Panasonic bided its time with 4K, says UK MD Andrew Denham

which is 1,440 x 1,080 resolution, to Full HD. Now five years on, the focus is upscaling Full HD to 3,840 x 2,160. The philosophy behind 4K CEVO is actually one of restoration, he reveals. Toshiba engineers have tried to recreate the movie image prior to its processing by the lensing camera's CMOS sensor. 'Any sensor converts the luminance and colour information into a digital signal, but during the process the original image always loses some information; digital images have a limited amount of colours. The 4K CEVO engine restores peak lighting lost during the initial digitalisation process as well as colour restoration. We also try and restore detailed texture information and smooth out jaggies.'

### HDMI 2.0 blows cover on Panasonic TV

It's been much debated, but HDMI 2.0 finally broke cover in Berlin and in one fell swoop changed the 4K/UHD TV landscape forever. Stealing a march over every other panel-maker at the show was Panasonic, which unveiled its first 4K set, and the world's first to incorporate the new connection standard. Consequently, the 65in TX-L65WT600 is the only TV out there fully compatible with 4K/UHD up to 60fps, likely to be required for 4K broadcast services. Current 4K TVs with HDMI 1.4 are only able to deliver 4K content up to 30Hz.

Panasonic UK MD Andrew Denham told *HCC*: 'We've been biding our time with 4K, not wanting to launch a product until it was right. We think this is the screen that consumers have been waiting for.' Denham said that the performance was so high he

Toshiba's Tasuhiro Nishioka says 58in is the brand's 4K sweet spot, but showcased a 50in prototype







### Corporate hospitality, German-style...

envisaged the panel finding a home with professional users as well as AV enthusiasts.

The WT600 offers other surprises, too. It's the first consumer TV to support DisplayPort 1.2a connectivity. Connect a PC with a 4K graphics card and gamers can enjoy bigscreen UHD gaming. A demo of the TV running the racing title *Project Cars* looked sensational, offering a resolution and frame-rate that even the next generation of games consoles will struggle to match.

Bizarrely, the HDMI organization actually held its official 2.0 launch after Panasonic's big reveal. The

## IFA IN BRIEF

Other things we spotted on the show floor

### Elipson Planet M in Gold



Elipson decided to show off a decidedly flash new version of the Planet M satellite.

Finished in matt gold with matching grille, this limited edition version is supplied in a plush display case with a matching NuForce amplifier to make a complete audio system.

### Pure Jongo T2, T4 and T6

Pure launched the newest additions to its Jongo multiroom system. The T2, T4 and T6 speakers are self-contained active designs that can be sent material over a wireless network or communicated with over Bluetooth. All three can also operate as stereo pairs communicating wirelessly with each other.

### Sonic Chair



One for the aspiring Bond villain, the Sonic Chair is a combination of designer furniture and

audio system with amplification and speakers built in to the body. A variety of sources are available but the most interesting uses the Audiofly wireless audio system that sends music files from any source that has an Audiofly module attached.

### Yamaha Relit LSX-700

Relit's designer Masaharu Ohno says Yamaha's new audio dock expresses 'sound through light in a unique and attractive way' – in other words, it doubles up as a mood lamp while you stream tunes via Bluetooth (including AptX support) to its speaker array, courtesy of the half-dozen LEDs top-mounted in its chassis. Cool – shame it won't be available until next year.

new HDMI specification increases bandwidth up to 18Gbps and in addition to supporting high-frame rate 4K, can handle up to 32 channels of audio, which could at some point enable a variant of Dolby Atmos, or one of its multichannel rivals, to make a play for the home.

Both Samsung and Philips promptly announced that they would produce new HDMI tuner boxes that were HDMI 2.0-compliant for owners of their first-gen 4K TVs. Sony said it would firmware update its 4K screens to handle 4K/UHD up to 60Hz by the end of the year, although the screens would not be 2.0-compliant in the truest sense. Although unconfirmed, it's believed that Sony will bring about compatibility by adopting a compromise 4.2.0 colour coding technique.

## Blu-ray Disc Association talks of a 4K future

Ultra HD Blu-ray edged a little closer to reality at IFA, with the governing BDA (Blu-ray Disc Association) hinting loudly (but not specifically confirming) that a specification for the next iteration of the standard was imminent. Appropriately surrounded by a forest of large 4K screens, BDA Promotions Committee VP Marty Gordon played 4K tease, declaring that Blu-ray was indeed 'the perfect format for 4K.'

The industry body has had a Format Extension Task Force busy on recommendations for the best part of a year now, and its deliberations are nearing their conclusion. 'We expect to make an announcement soon,' said Gordon coyly. 'It might be before CES... but it might be after.'

Blu-ray disc appears to be on a roll, despite the growing proliferation of options now available to the connected movie fan. 'There's a lot of momentum behind the format. Western Europe is good, the US is great. Over the last quarter, BD software sales were up 20 per cent,' said Gordon. In the UK, disc sales have grown 37 per cent over the first half of the year.

And BD Profile 4.0 isn't just going to be about a resolution bump, hints Gordon. 'We view the next step in Blu-ray as more than just 4K. If you're going to enhance the format, then really enhance the format! So we're considering a lot of other things, from dynamic range, to bitrate and sound quality. There are a lot of things to look at when considering the next step for BD.'

Clearly all this extra goodness will require a lot of space. While the BDA won't be drawn on its storage plans, at least one replicator, Singulus Technologies, is known to have been trialling triple-layer BD media able to store 100GB. Using improved compression technology, be it HEVC or a new variant, storage capacity per-layer can be expanded from 25GB to 33GB.

4K-compatible BD players will be backwards compatible with Full HD Blu-rays. While it seems it could be possible to produce dual-function, single inventory discs, it seems more likely that studios will opt for a Triple or Quad Play packaged solution. 'Compare it to 3D. When 3D Blu-ray was launched, studios had a choice to offer backwards





**Samsung (top) and LG (right) did battle with curved UHD OLED TVs. LG's was bigger, though**



**Philips unveiled an 84in version of its leanback DesignLine LED TV**

compatibility. Most opted to bundle a 3D disc with a 2D version,' says Gordon.

Of course, when Blu-ray launched, penetration was helped immeasurably by the Trojan Horse that was the PlayStation 3. We suggested to Gordon that this crafty fillip does not seem to be an option with either the PlayStation 4 or Xbox One. The man from the BDA's eyes twinkled. 'Well, maybe they will – who knows? After all the PS3 was patched to offer 3D Blu-ray support. One thing's for sure: the format will have an established base of 4K TVs when it launches...'

### Philips joins 4K fray

Philips foray into 4K got off to a cracking start at IFA, with its debut 65in 65PFL9708 screen being hailed by awards body EISA as the European UHD TV of the

year. The model has been developed by joint-venture company TP Vision and combines Ultra HD resolution with the brand's popular Ambilight XL mood lighting technology. The award-winner is joined in the Philips range by a sibling 84-incher, the 84PFL9708. Both sets feature the latest evolution of Philips highly regarded Pixel Perfect image processing. The company's TV technology guru Danny Tack gave *HCC* an exclusive insight into the technology, revealing some of the rocket science now grouped together under the brand's Ultra Resolution banner.

According to Tack, what gives his 4K screens an edge is not that they have more pixels, but that they have 'better pixels,' able to deliver perceivably finer detail when upscaling, thanks to proprietary line thinning technology. 'We first used line thinning when we began upscaling SD to HD, but now the concept has been reworked for 4K,' says Tack. The end result lends greater intensity to the images and adds perceived sharpness. Certainly demonstrations appear impressive, and it seems particularly effective with still photographic images. Detail screams from the screen.

Contrast and brightness on the 4K debutants also seems preternatural. 'That's down to a new way of dimming, which we call Micro Dimming Pro,' explains Tack. 'For the first time we have intelligently coupled the set's ambient light sensor with the backlight itself.' Unlike the Micro Dimming Premium system used on the brand's flagship Full HD panels, which uses segmented backlight control, the new 4K Pro version is used with a global backlight system, but automatically optimises depending on whether the viewing room is dark or bright.

While Philips' UHD screens will initially come to market with an HDMI 1.4 connector and separate tuner box, Tack confirmed that an upgrade box featuring HDMI 2.0 connectivity would be developed for those that wanted to upgrade. The original HDMI port would then be 'turned off.'

### Tech world goes curve crazy

The future of TV might not be curved, but that could well prove to be the shape of OLED. Both Samsung and LG used IFA to shill the concept of their bendy goggleboxes.

'The future is not flat!', proclaimed Samsung's Euro AV tsar Michael Zoeller, when unveiling the





P R I M A R E

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**Hi Fi News, February 2012**



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**Pioneer's SBX-N700 packs Wi-Fi, DLNA and Bluetooth – and sports a sizeable chassis and matching subwoofer**

brand's new SC9 OLED screen. 'Until now TVs have followed one basic rule – screens were flat – but we're changing that...' And his reasoning? 'The curve of the screen makes it feel as if the TV is larger. This creates an incredibly immersive viewing experience.'

Obviously Zoeller is fooling no one. The real reason to develop curved OLED TVs is to create a point of dramatic difference between OLED technology and the old guard of LED and plasma. The idea may well catch on; the TVs certainly look trendy.

The biggest curve ball at IFA actually came from LG, with its eleventh-hour unveil of a 77in OLED 4K curved prototype. At least on a screen size this large, the curve appeared properly cinematic.

Not to be outdone, Sony showed the world's first curved LED set – although it looked as convincing as a Shanghai iPhone. The back panel appeared to remain flat, with only the substrate carefully arched. The end result was really rather ghastly.

### Soundbars are everywhere!

This fast-growing part of the AV market shows no sign of slowing down, with brands both big and small all launching new products at IFA, across a wide price range.

As well as its HT-ST3 (see p8), Sony demo'd the HT-ST7, a high-end affair that aims to deliver a flagship performance and features a wireless subwoofer, 3-in, 1-out HDMI connectivity and Bluetooth and NFC support. It uses the brand's Magnetic Fluid speakers, also employed on its 65in X9005A Ultra HD TV, and will hit UK shelves in October with a £1,100 price tag.

Yamaha used IFA to bulk up its popular YSP range of soundbars with the new YSP-1400, a single-enclosure offering with two subwoofer drivers built into its chassis alongside eight beam drivers. Bluetooth is on hand for music streaming, and the 'bar can be controlled via Yamaha's HT Controller App for Android and iOS. It was joined on the stand by the YAS-152 soundbar designed for 55/60in screens, and the RX-S600 AV receiver. The latter is a slim-line (110mm high) five-channel networked model designed to slot onto an AV shelf without upsetting the décor.

Pioneer showed a trio of soundbars. The flagship model, the £350 SBX-N700, comes armed with a

range of connecting technologies – Wi-Fi, Wi-Fi Direct, DLNA and Bluetooth – enabling all manner of audio streaming, with the company's Sound Retriever tech present to buff up low-quality files. USB and HDMI hookup is offered.

Harman Kardon, meanwhile, is aiming high and handsome with its Sabre SB 35. Claiming to redefine 'what a home entertainment system should be across modern form, function and design,' it's certainly an eye-opener, courtesy of its thin 1.25in profile and aluminium trim (and even the matching subwoofer is only 3.5in deep – slip it under your sofa, perhaps?). This will sell for around £850 from November. If that's too much for you, even former blank media specialist Maxell is getting in on the soundbar act, and showcased the 2.1-channel £230 MXSP-B3000.

### Sony hopes to make hi-res audio mass market

Proving it has more concerns than just 4K, Sony used IFA to bow a new High Resolution Audio label. Hoping to capitalize on the trend for higher-quality audio files, the brand has developed a family of products which it says are suitable for hi-res file playback. In terms of marketing alone, this wheeze sounds like a winner.

The initial High Resolution Audio collection comprises hard drive audio players, a USB DAC amplifier and bookshelf SS-HA1 and SS-HA3 loudspeaker packages. The star performers in the range are the brand's £2,000 Wi-Fi-enabled HAP-Z1ES High Resolution Audio player and matching TA-A1ES stereo amplifier.

Demonstrations at the show sounded superb. The player, which features a 1TB hard drive, has a 10.9cm front-panel LCD used to display album art and track information. The duo can be controlled via a smartphone app. File compatibility is wide, and includes MP3, DSD (up to 5.6MHz), DSF, FLAC, WMA, ALAC, ATRAC and AIFF. 'Basically, whatever it is, this will play it,' we were told. A proprietary DSEE (Digital Sound Enhancement Engine) processor is used to restore fidelity to heavily compressed digital music files.

If separates aren't your thing, Sony also has a single-box alternative, the HAP-S1 compact HDD audio player. This features a 2 x 40W amplifier and integrated Wi-Fi ■



**Top: Batman and Spider-Man prowled the show floor... Above: Sony's newest Head Mounted Display provides a personal AV experience with 7.1 virtual sound**

**Music stored on Sony's £800 HAP-S1 can be browsed via its LCD display or a smartphone app**







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# Do you dare to press *'Play'?*



**Team HCC** runs a blood-soaked rule over a brood of horror film franchises that are dying to send shivers down your spine this Halloween

**EVERYONE LOVES** A good horror movie. Well, maybe not everyone, but the longevity of the genre suggests there are plenty of us who enjoy being frightened as we fumble for our popcorn. And whether you get your thrills from haunted houses, masked stalkers, shuffling zombies or cursed videotapes, there are plenty of flicks to choose from

when it comes to planning your Halloween home cinema entertainment. But why watch just one chiller on October 31st when there are entire franchises to savour?

Turn the page to see our definitive list of the horror films – and their sequels – that are guaranteed to scare you silly...

## 34 HORROR FRANCHISES



*Psycho* stands head and shoulders above most horror flicks...

### PSYCHO (1960-2013)

**The Bates Motel makes Fawlty Towers look like a nice place to stay**

Alfred Hitchcock's 1960 classic, based upon Robert Bloch's novel, proved that cinema audiences were ready for the genre to reach new heights in terms of violence, terror and cross-dressing killers, but fans of Norman Bates' weird take on the hospitality industry had to wait 22 years for *Psycho II*. The success of this sequel, handled with care by Hitchcock alumnus Richard Franklin, meant we'd be checking back into the murderous motel twice more, once for a continuation of the story (*Psycho III*) and again for a prequel/sequel (*Psycho IV: The Beginning*). Both are worth a shufti, although the law of diminishing returns does kick in. Completists can also check out the 2013 *Bates Motel* TV series, 1987 *Bates Motel* TV pilot and, if they're feeling brave, Gus Van Sant's shot-for-shot 1998 *Psycho* remake.

**Pick of the pack:** *Psycho: 50th Anniversary Edition* (All-region BD, Universal Pictures)

### THE EXORCIST (1973-2004)

**Don't watch these if you love to eat pea soup**

It may have been a major studio blockbuster that was nominated for 10 Academy Awards, but that didn't stop William Friedkin's 1973 shocker (about the battle between God and the Devil in the body of a 12-year-old girl) from effectively being banned on video in the UK until 1999. Curiously, by this time its two sequels – John Boorman's hilariously awful *Exorcist II: The Heretic* and William Peter Blatty's intriguing (but hampered by studio interference) *The Exorcist III* – had already been available for some time. Production of a prequel in the Noughties was so troubled (director Paul Schrader was eventually removed by the studio and Renny Harlin brought in to spice things up/dumb things down) that two distinct versions of the same story were eventually released – Harlin's *Exorcist: The Beginning* and Schrader's *Dominion: Prequel to The Exorcist*.

**Pick of the pack:** *The Exorcist: Extended Director's Cut & Original Theatrical Cut* (All-region BD, Warner Home Video)



### NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD (1968-2009)

**'They're coming to get you Barbara'**

Anybody who claims that politics has no place in the horror genre has clearly never watched any of George Romero's six ...*Living Dead* movies. The first film, 1968's taboo-busting *Night of the Living Dead*, stripped the zombie of its Voodoo origins and transformed it into a flesh-eating ghoul. *Dawn of the Dead* (1978), *Day of the Dead* (1985) and *Land of the Dead* (2005) brought the socio-political subtext to the fore, openly riffing on ideas such as consumerism and post-9/11 America. Romero then rebooted the series with the audience-splitting *Diary of the Dead* (2007) and *Survival of the Dead* (2009).

**Pick of the pack:** *Dawn of the Dead* (All-region BD, Arrow Video)



### THE TEXAS CHAINSAW MASSACRE (1974-2013)

**There's plenty of buzz surrounding these films**

Tobe Hooper secured his place in the horror movie hall of fame with 1974's *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*. A simple tale of a group of friends who fall victim to a family of cannibals (including the chainsaw-wielding Leatherface), it was banned in the UK until 1999 – and even led to a ban on the word 'chainsaw' in film titles. Three increasingly bizarre sequels followed (as did a high profile 2003 remake with its own prequel), prior to this year's *Texas Chainsaw 3D*, which ignores all of the others and purports to be a direct sequel to the original.

**Pick of the pack:** *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre: Seriously Ultimate Edition* (All-region BD, Second Sight)





## THE OMEN (1976-2006)

**For some devilish children, an ASBO just won't cut the mustard**

The horror genre has always got plenty of mileage out of spooky kids, but none were ever quite as memorable as *The Omen's* Damien Thorn. The actual Antichrist, this creepy little moppet could kill with just one look and even when he wasn't around, Satanic forces made sure to do-in anybody who might get in the way of his rise to power. Two sequels followed – *Damien: Omen II* and *Omen III: The Final Conflict* – charting his growth to adulthood, with the military academy-set *Damien...* proving to be more freaky and inventive than the first when it came to the all-important death scenes. A dreadful TV movie, *Omen IV: The Awakening*, arrived in 1991 (and was forgotten almost instantly). A remake was released in 2006, but failed to live up to the original.

**Pick of the pack:** *Damien: Omen II* (Region B BD, 20th Century Fox – *The Omen Trilogy* boxset)



## THE EVIL DEAD (1981-2013)

**The gore the merrier in Raimi's splatstick series**

As they're both instinctive, visceral experiences, horror and comedy have quite a lot in common. Which makes it all the more surprising that so few filmmakers succeed in bringing the two together. Sam Raimi is one of the few exceptions, with his *Evil Dead* trilogy mixing gags and gore in equal measure to remarkable effect. Spurred on by a love of *The Three Stooges* and his own madcap creativity, Raimi pioneered the splatstick genre and gave us the pinnacle of the form to date with 1987's *Evil Dead II*. Along the way he also delivered one of the most beloved (and put upon) heroes in the history of the genre: Bruce Campbell's Ashley J Williams. 1992's goofy Ray Harryhausen-inspired *Army of Darkness* marked Ash's last film adventure to date, but the franchise lives on in this year's reboot/loose sequel.

**Pick of the pack:** *Evil Dead 2: Special Edition*, (Region B BD, StudioCanal)

## AND DON'T FORGET ABOUT...

More horror series for you to sink your teeth into

### Amityville



The haunted house flick 'based on a true story' somehow managed to run to seven daft sequels (half of which revolve around haunted furniture) and a remake.

### Child's Play



Killer doll Chucky has come a long way since 1988's *Child's Play*. Over the course of six films he's been persecuted by UK tabloids and been more meta than *Scream*. *Curse of Chucky* arrives this month!

### Critters



Best by far of the many *Gremlins* rip-offs, the quartet of *Critters* films boast fun puppet effects (at least in the first two) and a winning sense of humour.

### Hellraiser



This sadomasochistic series now stretches across nine films – although only the first two are really worth bothering with. Creator Clive Barker is in the midst of writing a book he claims will kill off Pinhead.

### Phantasm



Don Coscarelli's four-part horror series about the Tall Man and his killer balls might not offer much in the way of internal logic, but this only adds to its dream-like (or should that be nightmarish?) nature.



## FRIDAY THE 13TH (1980-2009)

**The unluckiest day of the year? You betcha!**

Reviled by critics but loved by fans, the *Friday the 13th* franchise has to date spanned ten original films, a crossover with another horror legend (see p38) and a reboot. In that time Jason Voorhees has been the deformed child whose death spurred his mother to take revenge, a murderous wildman with a penchant for hockey masks, a zombie, a body-hopping demon and even a cyborg (following a trip into space in 2001's *Jason X*). But no matter what he is, the setup is essentially always the same – the films point him in the general direction of some drug-smoking, alcohol-drinking, misbehaving teens and let the slaughter commence...

**Pick of the pack:** *Friday the 13th: The Final Chapter* (US Import, All-region BD, Warner Home Video – *Friday the 13th: The Complete Collection* boxset)



## HALLOWEEN (1978-2009)

### Tricks and treats as terror takes Shape

It's been 35 years since the daddy of all slasher films first hacked and slashed its way to box office gold – and over the intervening years this landmark classic has lost none of its power to chill. The success of John Carpenter's film ensured that Michael Myers/The Shape would be back, carving up the denizens of Haddonfield in six direct sequels (he sat out the unconnected *Halloween III: Season of the Witch*), only to be seemingly laid to rest by Rob Zombie's dire 2007 remake and its follow-up.

**Pick of the pack:** *Halloween: 35th Anniversary Edition* (see below)

## SCREAM (1996-2011)

Wes Craven and Kevin Williamson lampoon the genre – but don't forget the scares

Only two years after he confounded fans with *Wes Craven's New Nightmare*, the director was back in the saddle to helm an even more post-modern fright flick. *Scream*, written by horror fanatic Kevin Williamson, mercilessly pokes fun at Hollywood's slasher flicks but remains itself a superior example of the genre, with terrifying set-pieces, buckets of blood and a *Scooby Doo*-style whodunnit attitude – smile knowingly at the sight gags and references while hiding behind your cushion. *Scream 2* has fun with the concept of sequels and 2011's *Scream 4* explores Hollywood's fascination with rebooting a franchise. It's only the lacklustre *Scream 3* that you might want to fast-forward through. An MTV TV series, scheduled for 2014, is now in pre-production.

**Pick of the pack:** *Scream* (Region B BD, Lionsgate)



# The night he came home in hi-def!

A new restoration gives John Carpenter's landmark slasher a new lease of life on BD

### → HALLOWEEN

Just like a fine wine or actress/model Monica Bellucci, John Carpenter's 1978 slasher just keeps getting better with age. Pared back to the absolute essentials, but shot through with Carpenter's widescreen artistry, *Halloween* eschews the gross-out gore that would become the hallmark of its countless imitators (and sequels) in favour of the far more basic – and rewarding – fun that comes from scaring the bejeezus out of its audience. It's a film that's both brilliant in its simplicity and quite simply brilliant.

**Picture:** Anchor Bay's original Blu-ray release of *Halloween* suffered from a much too vivid palette that stripped the film of its original neutral colours in favour of ruddy reds and bold blues.

This latest AVC 2.40:1 1080p restoration has been overseen by director of photography Dean Cundey and returns the film to its authentically cool colour scheme. Just as importantly, it also demonstrates considerably improved detail levels.

**Audio:** While the new Dolby TrueHD 7.1 remix kicks into high gear every time Carpenter's iconic score is in play and has a strong L/C/R presence, for much of the time the additional channels are essentially inactive. This is probably to be expected for a surround sound upgrade of a vintage low-budget flick.



Jamie learnt the dangers of Extreme Knitting

More bothersome is the accompanying mono soundtrack. Not only is it presented in 'lossy' Dolby Digital, but the track also proves to be an oddly anaemic presentation that has issues with missing and/or altered cues.

**Extras:** New to this release are a chatty commentary by John Carpenter and Jamie Lee Curtis, plus an hour-long documentary following the actress as she attends various horror conventions. More familiar extras takes the form of the scenes shot for the TV version, a location tour and a host of trailers, TV spots and radio spots – which, disappointingly, only scratches the surface of the many extras produced for previous DVD and BD releases.



### HCC VERDICT

**Halloween: 35th Anniversary Edition**

→ Anchor Bay

→ Region B BD → £25 Approx

**WE SAY:** The new restoration makes this disc a must-own for horror fans

**Movie** ★★★★★

**Picture** ★★★★★

**Audio** ★★★★★

**Extras** ★★★★★

**Overall** ★★★★★



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- Built-in 5W audio speaker







## RING (1998-2005)

### Japan unleashes the ultimate video nasty

Japan has a rich history of ghost stories, but it was Hideo Nakata's 1998 screen adaptation of Koji Suzuki's that opened the door to a global audience. This low-fi chiller about a cursed videotape was unlike anything most Western viewers had ever seen and boasts a shocking climax that sticks in the brain and refuses to leave. Two sequels quickly followed – the first (*Rasen*) an adaptation of Suzuki's own literary sequel, followed by Nakata's direct sequel to his own film (*Ring 2*). A prequel titled *Ring 0* arrived in 2000. *Ring* was also remade in Korea (*The Ring Virus*) and Hollywood (*The Ring*), with the latter also getting its own distinct sequel. Yet another Japanese film, *Sadako 3D*, was released in 2012 and *Sadako 3D 2* followed earlier this year.

**Pick of the pack:** *Ring* (R0 DVD, Palisades Tartan – *The Ring Trilogy* boxset)



## SAW (2004-2010)

### The Jigsaw Killer takes on-screen sadism to a whole new level

With yet another increasingly elaborate and unflinchingly gory sequel appearing every Halloween for six consecutive years, it's no wonder that the ongoing adventures of 'The Jigsaw Killer' and his apprentices became the definitive horror franchise of the Noughties. As such, people frequently forget that the series began in a much more modest (yet electrifying) style with the story of two men, chained up in a bathroom, one of whom is told to kill the other if he wants to save his family. Unable to repeat this trick, the filmmakers opted for bigger and more violent (and eventually 3D) sequels, packed with increasingly complex traps – but kept the awesome score.

**Pick of the pack:** *Saw: Special Edition* (Region B BD, Entertainment in Video)



## A NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET (1984-2010)

### Bad-skinned child killer Freddy Krueger wreaks havoc in suburbia – even though he's dead...

Wes Craven's *A Nightmare on Elm Street* draws upon the slasher film tropes established by *Halloween* and *Friday the 13th*, but uses frequent dream sequences (where knife-gloved nutter Freddy claims his victims) to add a level of downright weirdness; heads burst out of TVs, sheep clatter along corridors, people get turned into cockroaches... It's a blood-soaked and at times brilliant franchise, although the standout entries are, unsurprisingly, the three movies with Craven's input (the original plus ...*Dream Warriors* and the post-modern ...*New Nightmare*). The 2010 remake is best treated as a bad dream.

**Pick of the pack:** *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (All-region BD, Warner Home Video)



## CLASH OF THE TITANS

### The curious world of *Freddy vs. Jason*

A potential meeting of terror titans Freddy Krueger and Jason Voorhees first surfaced in 1987, only for disagreements between the two studios responsible (New Line and Paramount) to scupper it. When New Line also nabbed the rights to Jason in the '90s, fans expected *Freddy vs. Jason* to be fast-tracked, but despite a tease at the end of 1993's *Jason Goes to Hell: The Final Friday*, story problems trapped the film in development hell for a decade. When it did finally arrive fans turned out in droves; the film netted over \$110 million worldwide.



## FINAL DESTINATION (2000-2011)

**Teens cheat Death, so Death offs teens in a series of freaky accidents**

The slickly-produced and refreshingly original *Final Destination* made a killing at the box office, so sequels were to be expected – four of them so far. Thankfully, the latter entries maintain the dark humour and gore of the franchise starter, with *FD2* being the best of the series, and even the 3D fifth movie showing the producers haven't yet run out of steam. Yes, the characters are essentially corpses waiting to happen, but the real star of *FD* is the Grim Reaper himself, whose playful (and fatal) pranks will ensure you'll never want to go on a sunbed again.

**Pick of the pack:** *Final Destination 2* (Region B BD, Entertainment in Video)

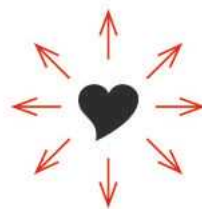


## PARANORMAL ACTIVITY (2007-2012)

**Definitely not your typical home movies**

Shot in 2007, Oren Peli's \$15,000 found footage ghost story generated a healthy buzz on the festival circuit and was snatched up by Paramount. While the film didn't hit cinemas until 2009, two years' worth of hype, plus a canny viral marketing campaign, helped propel it to over \$107 million at the US box office. Three similarly successful sequels (and countless spoofs – always a good barometer of success) followed, as did an unofficial Japanese film – *Paranormal Activity 2: Tokyo Night!* *Paranormal Activity 5* is due to scare up more business next year.

**Pick of the pack:** *Paranormal Activity* (Region B BD, Icon Home Entertainment)



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# Serious about sound

**Mark Craven** checks out a dedicated cinema room with reference-grade audio and a passionate owner





The room has space for nine film fanatics



The home cinema is part of a complete smarthome makeover

#### KIT CHECKLIST

**STEINWAY LYNGDORF:** P1 processor; 6 x A1 digital amplifiers (2 x 400W each); 7 x S-15 speakers; 4 x Model LS Boundary Woofers; RoomPerfect calibration/correction  
**OPPO:** BDP-105EU Blu-ray player  
**STREAM:** EVO media server  
**SKY:** Sky+HD PVR  
**SONY:** VPL-VW1000ES 4K projector  
**IMAGE SCREENS:** 4.3m acoustically transparent projector screen, with automatic masking and custom vector artwork  
**EDMUND OPTICS:** Custom-made projector 'window'  
**FRONT ROW:** 9 x leather cinema chairs  
**HODGSON & HODGSON:** SilentDoor timber acoustic door  
**CONTROL4:** System control via 4in touchscreen and iPad  
**RAKO:** Lighting system programmed with four scenes, plus individual lighting circuit control

**THIS STUNNING CINEMA** room is slightly unusual, in that it's the pride and joy of a passionate AV-holic, Nigel, but is part of a wider property that he is renovating to sell. In short, whoever buys the house gets a dedicated movie den thrown in. And they don't come much better than this.

The cinema is on the ground floor of a South London property with industrial heritage that's in the process of being converted into a 21st-century Smart apartment. During my visit, I was shown around, taking in everything from a mirrored gym room with in-ceiling Triad speakers, a glitzy kitchen with a hidden in-wall subwoofer(!) and a master bedroom and bathroom suite with a private jacuzzi flanked by a waterproof flatscreen – all with integrated control. As makeovers go, it's an

absolute knockout – but it's the high-end theatre I was most interested in.

#### Time to Marvel

The room is entered via an unassuming door along a well-lit corridor with only a *Thor* poster hinting at what's to come – stepping into it is like entering another property altogether. It's a big space, with dark walls and carpeting contrasting with light-coloured leather recliners and a subtle blue lighting scheme.

The focal point of the cinema is the 4.3m-wide acoustically transparent screen from Image Screens. When the room isn't running in movie mode, it displays a bespoke *Toy Story* vector artwork (on a separate electrically-controlled canvas) lit with pin-point accuracy by a trio of lights from illumination expert Anthony Juer. Both this

The projection screen displays a custom-made *Toy Story* artwork when not in use



and the ivory seating help make the room seem a little less tech-heavy to potential buyers, says Nigel. He also tells us he considered getting a *Predator* artwork instead of the Pixar fresco...

Creating images for the screen is Sony's VPL-VW1000ES projector – at the time of specification the only commercially available 4K model around. It was chosen not only for its groundbreaking resolution, but the value for money it offers – I was told that more expensive Full HD models were considered.

The Sony is actually housed in a ceiling recess in the room behind, firing inwards but through an anti-reflective window, designed for the task by Edmund Optics. This has been

**'The front soundstage was huge – Steinway Lyngdorf's speakers may look small, but they're ever so potent'**

done at considerable cost to ensure one thing – that none of the projector's fan noise is audible within the cinema.

Sound, it transpires, is Nigel's big passion. It's evident as soon as he begins explaining the construction of the room itself: 'It's essentially a box, within a box, within a box, using concrete breeze blocks, MDF and fabric, with different levels decoupled. The doors alone weigh 250kg each, and there's an 85dB drop from here to the room next door. The neighbours say they've never heard a thing.'

The latter is surprising, as the audio specified is very high-end – a 7.4-channel

Steinway Lyngdorf array. This, Nigel reveals, was chosen only after an extensive, year-long 'road-trip' where he travelled around Blighty auditioning systems from the likes of MK Sound, JBL Synthesis and Artcoustic. In the end, he says, the Steinways (from Gecko Home Cinema) easily came out on top.

Mostly this is due to their astonishing performance, but there's a cost benefit, too: with Steinway Lyngdorf's P1 processor and A1 digital amplifier employing the brand's Room Perfect correction/calibration wizardry, Nigel reveals he's been able to eschew traditional acoustic room treatments altogether, and therefore save an estimated £40,000. The only work that he thinks might be necessary is tightening up a loose doorknob on the kit cupboard.

Source equipment includes an Oppo BDP-105EU Blu-ray player, Sky+HD PVR and Stream EVO media server. These all sit in the AV rack alongside the electronics that drives the rest of the house – as such, opening the door is a dizzying experience, with multiple Sky boxes, Onkyo AVRs and Control4 processors blinking away. It's noisy, too, but with the door shut, no sound escapes. The rack can also be accessed from the cupboard outside, making rear-panel maintenance easy. And, in a neat touch, some of the whole-house source components face the other way, meaning no one has to enter the cinema room to swap a disc.

#### Sitting comfortably

After my initial tour and chat, I sat down in the front row (on Front Row seating, as it happens – another area where Nigel kept his budget down. 'You can spend five grand on a chair, but when you have nine of them



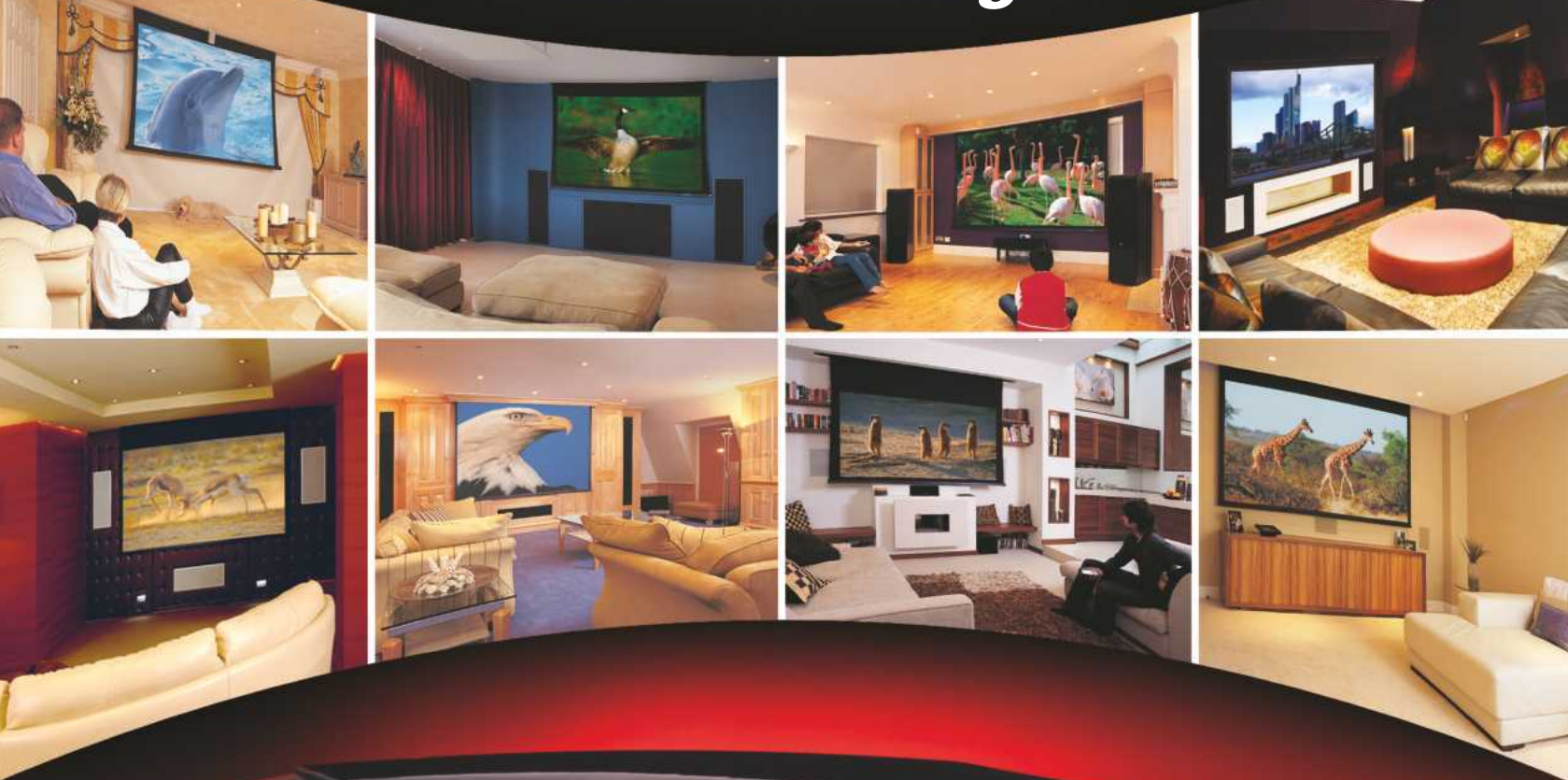
Steinway Lyngdorf's S-15 is used across the front soundstage and for all four surround channels

that soon adds up!'). I was prepared to be impressed, but ended up being blown away. Despite having heard the Steinways in action before and spent quality time with Sony's 4K upscaler, neither experience had matched the one offered by this precision-engineered setup.

Visually, *Bolt* on Blu-ray looked perfect, with the VPL-VW1000ES crafting a sharp, smooth and above all beautifully bright image on the massive screen. Yet the 7.4-channel audio was the real star. Steinway Lyngdorf's S-15 speakers, employed here for all seven channels, may look small but they're astonishingly potent – the front soundstage was simply huge, with dialogue delivered with real punch. Crystalline clarity and perfect steering may be the first thing that comes to mind when you think of the Danish marque, but in tandem with the proprietary amplification and processing, this is no gently-does-it array. Nigel ramped up the volume and the speakers just egged him on to go further.



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The quartet of subwoofers certainly adds to the fun. Each armed with two 12in drivers (so eight in total) and capable of hitting 120dB, they moved so much air I could feel it in my face. When Disney's super-hound is given the order to unleash hell ('Bolt! Speak...'), the seismic ripple unleashed by his bark thundered into the room with brutal intensity, yet sweetly integrated with the rest of the array. It's a full-range performance, with breathtaking scale, dynamism and accuracy.

And, yes, it's only seven channels. The room is certainly large enough for height and width speakers, but Nigel isn't yet interested, because Steinway Lyngdorf isn't interested either. He has a love affair with these cabinets and their matching amps and processor – and I don't blame him.

### Punk rockers

We moved on to *Tron: Legacy*. Even in its regular 2D guise, the upscaled 4K image provided tangible depth, while Daft Punk's inventive electro score swelled and throbbed with menace. Again, the scale of the soundstage, the invisible nature of the speakers and the finesse of the higher frequencies proved astonishing. Further demos – from *Oblivion* on Blu-ray (see the *Disc Pick* box, top right) to Queen's *Bohemian Rhapsody* on multichannel DVD-Audio – were equally jaw-dropping, while watching the climatic battle sequence in *The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey* proved once and for all that Warner's sound mix is woefully short in terms of LFE. The vertically-stacked Steinway woofers, which had been so impressive, were here given little to do. This is the benefit of a high-end setup, of course; the ruthless clarity that enables you to pick out details in soundtracks that you might not have noticed before also reveals their limitations.

There's more to this cinema's appeal than its AV prowess, however. It has some neat tricks up its sleeve, beyond the natural-at-this-price use of an integrated control system (in this case, Control4), complete with a wall-mounted iPad. For instance, an ante-room behind a hidden door offers a drinks-stocked fridge and shelving for Blu-rays and DVDs, while the roof houses a bespoke star ceiling installation that surprises with intermittent shooting stars, courtesy of runs of closely-packed fibre-optics that fire quickly in sequence. Even the rear-room wall-lighting is rather clever, with Nigel using an off-the-shelf patio light fitting, replacing the existing white LED lamp with a blue bulb, and housing it in 5in black-painted backbox. The effect

## DISC PICK – OBLIVION

Nigel reveals his favourite Blu-ray platter

'Aside from being an excellent film, the recording quality of this Blu-ray is second to none – it is as close to perfection as I have ever come across. Not only is the picture quality absolutely stunning, especially when viewed through the Sony PJ, the sound quality is phenomenal, with full-range audio well down to single-digit frequencies and incredible dynamic range. An absolute must for demonstrating the capabilities of an audio system;

or indeed a system's limitations, as the demanding soundtrack is sure to press the majority of systems to the maximum (and beyond). I already know of several setups that are unable to handle playing this particular film at reference level without clipping/distorting. Also, be prepared for everything and anything in your home cinema room that is not nailed down to shake, rattle and roll when those ultra-low frequencies kick in!'



being that the lighting seems to float in front of the wall.

### Nothing lasts forever

So this room represents the culmination of Nigel's painstaking research and some classy construction, aided by Essex-based install outfit Sensoria AV. And he knows it won't be his to play with forever – with the work elsewhere in the property soon to be finished, a buyer will no doubt be found, and they'll

then be the ones plopping a platter in the player and swimming in surround sound supremacy. The good news is that he'll then be able to focus his attention on the setup in his own house, where he tells me he's eyeing up Sony's 84in Ultra HD TV – or possibly the same company's new VPL-VW500ES projector – and, yes, another Steinway Lyngdorf system. So, similar electronics but just on a slightly smaller scale. I'd like to check that room out, too... ■



The AV rack controls all the zones in the house as well as the cinema room

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# REVIEWS

→ **HARDWARE HIGHLIGHTS** **KALEIDESCAPE** The brand's most affordable movie server yet **PIONEER** BDP-160 Blu-ray/SACD player **HUMAX** Media-savvy Freesat Free Time STB **YAMAHA** Aventure 7.2-channel AV receiver **BENQ** 3D-ready 720p cinema projector **ONEFORALL** Touchscreen universal remote control **ROUNDUP** Five mid-range 40/42in TVs go head-to-head **AND MORE!**

## Premium projection

SIM2's Super Lumis aims to eke out the best picture possible from a Full HD resolution. Does it succeed? See p52



### HCC RATINGS KEY...

Outstanding	★★★★★
Above average	★★★★☆
Acceptable	★★★☆☆
Disappointing	★★☆☆☆
Dire	★☆☆☆☆



# (Most of your) movies made simple

**Mark Craven** loves the simplicity and slickness of Kaleidescape's newest – and most affordable – media server, but wishes it would play ball with all of his discs

**KALEIDESCAPE'S CINEMA ONE** sees the American media server specialist lowering the price point at which technophiles can enter its world of slick music and movie jukeboxing. Well, sort of – the asking price of £3,300 will still be too much for many, particularly considering the less-than-perfect way it enables Blu-ray rips to be played...

So what does your money get you? Firstly, you get a Blu-ray player, although in comparison to other machines it's far from state-of-the-art. Connectivity comprises

a single HDMI output, USB and Ethernet ports, and stereo analogue and coaxial audio outputs. The USB is used in conjunction with a supplied Wi-Fi adapter. Both this and the Ethernet connection are provided to get the Cinema One online where it will grab data related to imported discs, and access the Kaleidescape Movie Store. You can't bring in your own media files from a storage device or your home network.

Nor will the Cinema One play DVD-Audio or Super Audio CDs, which is a pity considering

its main *raison d'être* is as a luxurious vault for all your entertainment content. Says the company: 'It is unlikely that we will support Super Audio CD or DVD-Audio due to the tepid market acceptance and declining sales of these formats.' I'd argue that the premium systems that may be served by the Cinema One could well be owned by multichannel music fans.

Furthermore, the Cinema One turns a blind eye to 3D Blu-rays. When we previously spoke to the company about stereoscopy, we were





The Cinema One packs a 4TB HDD for BD/DVD/CD rips



A neatly designed – and backlit – remote. No eject button, though!

told it was waiting for a 3D-enabled chipset to become available that would be suitable for its products. It obviously still hasn't found one.

The jukebox functionality is where Kaleidescape's new machine warrants its price tag. The disc-player element is matched by a 4TB server, capable of storing around 600 DVDs, 100 Blu-rays, 6,500 CDs or a mixture of all three. These rips are offered with transparent AV quality, their relative disc's menu options and served up with hi-res cover art and oodles of Kaleidescape's own metadata. Browsing your media therefore becomes a glitzy experience – you can peruse a fullscreen montage of Blu-ray sleeves, search the library for specific actors, directors, genres, etc, or, perhaps, just decide to play every track stored on the Cinema One that Kaleidescape has tagged as Speed Metal.

In addition to this, a ripped file becomes swiftly accessible – there's no need to wait while a Blu-ray loads up, no menus to skip and you can access user-defined scenes (or those already curated by Kaleidescape's metadata squad) with just a few button presses.

In all, it's a fantastic interface and system that's easy to fall in love with.

### Bending over backwards for BD

A fly in Kaleidescape's ointment concerns Blu-ray. Due to the demands of the Blu-ray

Disc Association, a ripped BD will only play if the physical disc is in the Cinema One player. Considering it takes a good while to import a disc, the fastest way to spin a BD movie is just to insert it, press play and not bother ripping it – here you still get all the metadata goodies and the ability to skip menus and trailers.

The solution to this problem is to link the Cinema One to Kaleidescape's DV700 Disc Vault (stashed away in a rack), which can store 320 platters. House titles here, and the Cinema One will then be allowed to spool out the ripped file. The DV700 typically sells for £4,600, but you can buy it together with the Cinema One for £6,775.

An alternative to archiving Blu-rays is to download Full HD movies directly from the aforementioned Movie Store, an online service that launched in the UK this Summer. They're supplied with the same audio tracks (including lossless) and extra features as their counterpart Blu-rays. Prices range from £8.99 to £13.99 depending on the title. DVD-quality downloads can also be purchased for less. The Movie Store currently offers a range of film and TV series from initial partner studio Warner (US consumers get Lionsgate titles, too). Kaleidescape tells me it is hard at work to secure more content deals from other studios.

A very recent addition to the Movie Store also goes some way to working around the

### AV INFO

**PRODUCT:** CD/DVD/BD server/player

**POSITION:** The brand's most affordable product

**PEERS:** Immerse MSI-3D; Mozaex Chroma; DF Solutions Base 3D



server's BD limitations. Courtesy of a new UltraViolet-linked disc-to-digital feature, you can pay a fee (£1.49) to acquire a digital version of a Blu-ray title you already own (e.g. one ripped to the player). This version can then be downloaded from the store to be watched, and there's no need to have the disc in the system anywhere.

### Rack 'em up

The Cinema One uses a full-width chassis and looks neat and tidy on your rack. The outer grey metal case gives way to a white plastic fascia, with a disc slot (rather than a tray) on the left-hand side, basic controls on the right and the Kaleidescape logo taking centre stage.

The player is supplied with an HDMI cable, Ethernet cable and Wi-Fi adapter. The remote control seems a little less luxurious than the

**'Existing Kaleidescape customers will see this as a simple, affordable addition to their setup'**

main unit, but is at least backlit and sensibly designed. An alternative control option is Kaleidescape's free app. This is only available for Apple's iPad and as such went untested here. An Android version would be handy. You can also buy a dedicated 'Child' remote that's designed to make it easier for junior film fans to find movies that their parents have tagged as child-friendly.

The Cinema One is a joy to use. The menu systems are mostly intuitive, meaning it's easy to perform tech tasks such as changing the output resolution or establishing a Wi-Fi connection. Slide a disc into the slot and you're quickly presented with its vital statistics and given the option of playing it or importing it.

**The USB socket is used with a supplied Wi-Fi adapter to get the Cinema One online, cable-free**

Do the latter and it will give you an estimated time to complete the task – be prepared for BD rips to take a while; copying *The Cabin In The Woods* was achieved in 1hr 40mins.

AV quality is faultless. Blu-ray material archived to the 4TB hard drive plays out with no discernible difference to its disc-based brethren. Edges are sharp, motion is smooth and there's oodles of detail on show. Soundtracks can either be bitstreamed (up to 7.1) to your AVR, or decoded as PCM. Similarly, ripped CDs retain their original clarity.

### Simple to use

At the mere mention of Kaleidescape, some AV enthusiasts are prone to frothing at the mouth and explaining that they can achieve much the same system with a few terabytes of storage, some media playing software and a BD ripper. However, the Cinema One (and the brand's other products) just aren't aimed at such consumers. This is an ultra-slick, simple-to-use alternative to a DIY server, and one that doesn't tread on any legal grey areas and, in my experience, never crashes. It therefore has considerable appeal.

Where it dazzles is as a DVD and CD repository. Chuck these platters onto the roomy HDD and they go from being a jumble on your shelf to a neatly navigated collection. But a change to the Blu-ray playback criteria is what's needed to make this be a must-own product for everyone. Likewise, the Movie Store still needs more content and the player itself could offer more – a quieter running noise, SACD/DVD-A playback and support for 3D Blu-rays. Existing Kaleidescape customers will see this a simple, affordable addition to their setup, bringing the functionality to another room, perhaps. And if newbies can accept it as a BD player rather than a server, they'll no doubt be impressed, too ■

### ON THE MENU



→ The user interface is a mixture of concise, intuitive setup menus and image-laden library screens. Searching for content can be done by cover art, genre, title or various other criteria. Heaps of fun

### SPECIFICATIONS

**HDD:** Yes. 4TB (space for 100 Blu-rays/600 DVDs/6,500 CDs)  
**CONNECTIONS:** HDMI; stereo phono audio; digital coaxial; Ethernet; USB for supplied Wi-Fi adapter; IR input  
**DOLBY TRUEHD/DTS-HD BITSTREAM:** Yes  
**DOLBY TRUEHD/DTS-HD DECODING:** Yes  
**SACD/DVD-A PLAYBACK:** No/No  
**DIMENSIONS:** 432(w) x 71(h) x 254(d)mm  
**WEIGHT:** 4.62kg  
**FEATURES:** Wi-Fi/Ethernet hookup for metadata collection/access to Kaleidescape Movie Store; 1080p60/50/24, 1080i60/50, 720p60/50, 576p, 576i, 480p, 480i video output; user-definable scenes; extensive content search options; cover art GUI; control via Kaleidescape iOS app; Crestron/AMX/Control4/Savant compatibility; DVD region code changeable up to four times; video processing and user interface selectable to 2.35:1 (CinemaScope mode); players can be linked together, or with Kaleidescape Vaults, in multiroom setups

### HCC VERDICT



#### Kaleidescape Cinema One

→ £3,300 Approx → [www.kaleidescape.com](http://www.kaleidescape.com)  
 → Tel: 01344 317970

**HIGHS:** Easy to use; brilliant hi-res interface/operating system; faultless AV quality; Movie Store service; great for DVD and CD collections

**LOWS:** No 3D/SACD/DVD-A support; Blu-ray playback limitations; runs a little noisily

**Performance** ★★★★★

**Design** ★★★★★

**Features** ★★★★★

**Overall** ★★★★★





# The Heart and Soul of Home Cinema

Precision; a new luxury loudspeaker range from Tannoy, engineered to deliver movies precisely as the director intended. High power double-magnet drivers, mass-load cabinets and extremely low-loss crossovers effortlessly deliver breath-taking detail and explosive movie dynamics. Built around a brand new 6 inch (150 mm) version of Tannoy's world renowned Dual Concentric™ driver, two stunning floorstanding models, a compact stand-mount and matching centre channel speaker ensure there is a Precision multichannel system for every size room. Powerful, passionate and incredibly precise, Precision gets to the heart and soul of home cinema like no other speaker in its class.

# Both a beauty and a beast

SIM2's latest extraordinary projector powerhouse transports **John Archer** to home cinema heaven



SIM2 is retaining its traditional curved chassis for the Super Lumis





## AV INFO

**PRODUCT:**

Reference-grade three-chip DLP home cinema projector

**POSITION:**

The Super Lumis is the current Lumis range-topper

**PEERS:**

SIM2 Lumis 3D-S; Sony VPL-VW1000ES

**I KNOW WHAT** you're thinking: how in the name of Citizen Kane can any home cinema 'toy' like the SIM2 Super Lumis justify a price of £37,000? Well, I'm going to tell you. And if I do my job right, by the end the only question you'll be asking will be 'Where can I get my hands on 37 grand?'

First, though, a bit of contextualisation. The thing is, despite its price, the Super Lumis triple-chip DLP projector is not a 4K model; its DarkChip 4 Texas Instruments optical system delivers a normal Full HD 1,920 x 1,080 image. Which, as *HCC*'s editor stresses on p79, is the same resolution as the one on your fancy new smartphone.

This may seem disturbing in light of Sony unveiling an £8,500 4K projector at this year's IFA technology show, following the £16,000 VPL-VW1000ES outed in 2012. But SIM2 has a pretty sound defence. First, a deal between Texas Instruments and commercial DLP cinema brands means no home theatre 4K DLP products can launch until 2015. Second, even if a SIM2 4K DLP home cinema projector was possible, it would cost vastly more than the Super Lumis tested here.

Lastly, resolution is only one part of the projector picture quality story. Contrast, brightness, lamp quality/handling and the optical quality of the lens are also crucial. And SIM2 contends that because the Super Lumis is superior in these other areas it will produce pictures so impressive you won't give the lack of 4K a second thought.

**Gorgeous Giorgio**

Your love affair with the Super Lumis will begin as soon as you look at it. As with all Lumis projectors it sports the sensational Giorgio Revoldini design, featuring a beautiful combination of bold curves and a high-gloss gun-metal grey finish. Yet the projector is also remarkably compact considering the amount of light power tucked inside.

Connections, meanwhile, include two v1.4 HDMI, a trio of 12V trigger ports to aid system integration, a D-Sub PC port, a component video input, an RS-232 control port, and a 3D Sync Output for attaching the supplied external 3D transmitter.

As its name and price suggest, the Super Lumis delivers substantial improvements over SIM2's already rather delightful Lumis series. Beyond a revamped version of its ALPHAPATH light delivery technology, and enhancements to many of the brand's mechanical and optical components, the key change is the inclusion of a 350W lamp versus the 280W one in the Lumis 3D-S, resulting in a huge increase in brightness output from 3,000 to 5,000 ANSI Lumens. In fact, there's so much brightness to play with from the Super Lumis that SIM2 offers a choice of lens types: either high brightness (HB) lenses that make full use of the lamp's huge output, or

Extended Contrast (EC) lenses that limit the maximum light output to 3,800 Lumens but deliver a high (considering how bright the image is) 30,000:1 contrast ratio. You can also choose from three different lens throw options: the short-throw T1, the medium-throw T2, and the long-throw T3. Such lens flexibility is all part of the brand's high-end ethos.

Note that the T1 is incompatible with SIM2's Perfect Fit lens memory feature, which allows the PJ to store multiple zoom and focus settings to suit different aspect ratios when using a 21:9 screen – thus saving you having to bother with an external anamorphic lens.

**Comprehensive configuration**

Buy a Super Lumis and it will inevitably be installed for you. However, if you do like to tinker with hardware yourself you'll probably adore the well-calibrated zoom, focus, and vertical/horizontal shift mechanisms and be dazzled by the almost limitless colour flexibility of the supplied Live Colours 2.0 Calibration software. I was.

Fire the SIM2 up and you'll find your viewing room has become a commercial-grade cinema. This is, of course, the ambition of any home cinema projector, but I've not tested any other (besides, perhaps, the £140,000

**'Despite its price, the Super Lumis projector is not a 4K model – it offers a regular Full HD resolution'**

Meridian 810) that has achieved the effect so successfully. The job of the rest of this review is to explain exactly why the Super Lumis works so brilliantly.

Let's start with the massive impact of its monstrous brightness. Not only does this enable the SIM2 to produce much larger pictures than most projectors – and craft remarkably natural and punchy images even with ambient light in your room – it also helps the projector eke out every last bit of picture information during even the darkest or most starkly contrasted scenes, like those in the halls of the Goblin King in *The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey*. Images consistently achieve a sense of depth, texture, density, light/colour balance and simple naturalism that makes it hard to believe you're not watching celluloid. The brightness of the Super Lumis also feeds into its colour reproduction, enabling it to give fuller, more vibrant expression to a Blu-ray's colour palette.

I wouldn't be saying any of this if the Super Lumis's luminance power wasn't joined by an >



excellent contrast performance. Here, the quality of its triple-chip DarkChip 4 system, light path and lens arrangement delivers a brilliant black level despite its radiant brightness. Projector heavyweight JVC gets blacker still with its DLA-X75 and DLA-X95 models, perhaps, but only while delivering a fraction of the SIM2's brightness and its attendant advantages.

Having tested multiple 4K products, including Sony's VPL-VW1000ES projector, I'm impressed by how pristine the bigscreen visuals look on this Full HD model. The sense of pixel

**'Images achieve a sense of depth, texture, colour balance and naturalism that simply astonishes'**

density, texture and detail in the images is gorgeous, seemingly proving the argument that lens flair and other picture factors are at least as important as native resolution.

3D delivery is exquisite. Texas Instruments' 144Hz Triple Flash active shutter system (you get four free pairs of spex) works in conjunction with the Super Lumis's potent lamp to showcase the incredibly rich detailing possible with quality Full HD 3D Blu-rays like *The Hobbit...* and *Avatar*. With its brightness and boosted contrast comes an accurate, deep and natural sense of depth in the 3D frame, adding scale to massive environments like Tolkien's subterranean caverns. And this is all achieved despite a reduction in brightness, caused by the glasses that is so considerable I suspect it could put some people off

**Connections include a pair of HDMI inputs, plus 12V trigger and RS-232 system control**

watching 3D. That would be a shame, as this is the most impressive 3D imaging device I've yet had in my demo room.

### Not a fan of fan noise

The Super Lumis isn't completely perfect, however. All that lamp power can lead to some fairly potent fan noise if you're using it at full tilt. SIM2 lets you adjust the output in 10W stages, though, so unless your room is cavernous or infiltrated by ambient light, you should consider dropping the output to its 310W or 320W level for 2D. This also helps disguise some faint dithering noise over fast-moving skin tones, and a slight tendency to draw attention to 24p judder when using the very highest brightness settings.

I also wasn't blown away by the Super Lumis's motion processing, which looks rather unnatural and artefactual even on its lowest power setting. But then most serious film fans wouldn't dream of enabling such trickery anyway.

And then there's the price. On paper, the arrival of 4K should make the £37,000 ticket of this Full HD model a tough sell. Some will turn their nose up at it as they rush out to audition Sony's new VPL-VW500ES (which we'll be reviewing in our next issue).

Yet the reality is that if you're the sort of person for whom spending £37,000 on anything other than a mortgage is possible, the SIM2 Super Lumis is about as close as you can get to a commercial cinema experience without actually buying a commercial cinema projector. Or a commercial cinema, for that matter. High price, high-performance and highly impressive ■

### ON THE MENU

→ The only thing not high-end about the Super Lumis is its operating system. Onscreen menus are dull and confusing to navigate, while the remote is a plasticky affair that doesn't belong in the same universe as the PJ. The reality is that neither of these issues are important, since it's most likely to be professionally installed, and driven by a separate system controller

### SPECIFICATIONS

**3D:** Yes. Triple Flash active shutter

**ULTRA HD:** No. 1,920 x 1,080

**CONNECTIONS:** 2 x HDMI; 3 x 12V trigger ports; D-Sub PC input; component video input; RS-232 control port; D Sync output

**BRIGHTNESS (CLAIMED, DEPENDING ON LENS):** 5000 ANSI Lumens

**CONTRAST (CLAIMED, DEPENDING ON LENS):** 30,000:1

**DIMENSIONS:** 458(w) x 210(h) x 455(d)mm

**WEIGHT:** 11kg

**FEATURES:** Three-chip DLP projector; 350W lamp output reducible in stages to 80 per cent of max brightness; dynamic contrast function; multiple lens options; four pairs of 3D glasses and transmitter included in price; ALPHAPATH technology; Live Colours 2.0 calibration software

### HCC VERDICT



**SIM2 Super Lumis**

→ £37,000 Approx → [www.sim2.co.uk](http://www.sim2.co.uk)  
→ Tel: 01825 750850

**HIGHS:** Jaw-dropping picture quality with both 2D and 3D images; beautiful design; superb setup flexibility

**LOWS:** It runs noisily in high lamp modes; motion processing is best avoided; most of us will never be able to afford one; it's not 4K

**Performance** ★★★★★

**Design** ★★★★★

**Features** ★★★★★

**Overall** ★★★★★



# Invasion of the Body Snatchers

A PHILIP KAUFMAN FILM

**"A THRILLINGLY  
NERVY HORROR FILM"**

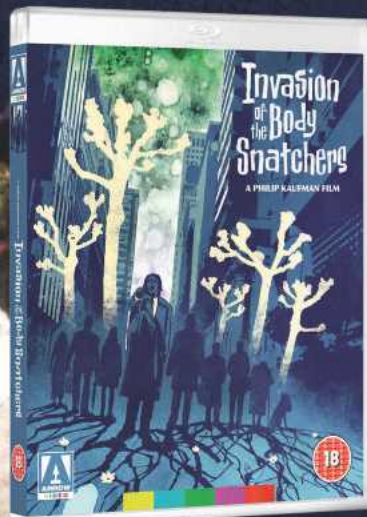
The Telegraph

**"NOT ONLY MATCHES THE  
ORIGINAL IN HORRIFIC  
TONE AND EFFECT, BUT  
EXCEEDS IT IN BOTH  
CONCEPTION AND  
EXECUTION"**

Variety

**"NEVER FAILS TO  
GIVE THE AUDIENCE JUST  
WHAT IT NEEDS"**

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# Old school Blu-ray

Not all disc spinners need to look like shiny Pringles. Pioneer's affordable BDP-160 lets **Steve May** celebrate the return of the slab

**PIONEER'S BDP-160 BLU-RAY** player is unrepentantly old school. For starters, it looks like a Blu-ray deck should, rather than something impractical cobbled together for a Shoreditch design competition. And secondly, it even handles some of the more obscure discs you still own and would rather like to keep, such as those Destiny's Child SACDs (but not, unfortunately, your DVD-Audio platters). But equally it's no Luddite, offering network file playback and token online diversions, too.

For those seeking a 3D-compatible player to partner a new telly, or latecomers still moving from DVD, this Pioneer has just enough funk to stoke the fires of upgrade. It is, in short, worth a closer look. It's not too much of a

spoiler to reveal that I rather like it – although it doesn't emerge entirely smelling of caramel popcorn and roses.

## Dated design

The player is a classic slab, measuring 435mm across and 250mm deep. You can rack it, stack it and pile copies of *HCC* high atop it. Everything you'd want to do with a Blu-ray player, in fact. Rear connections are standard issue: there's a solitary HDMI, plus digital coaxial audio and stereo phono outputs, Ethernet and USB. Wi-Fi is built in. The transport mechanism itself is loaded centrally, with a second front-facing USB presented to the right. Reflecting the low asking price, the build quality is unavoidably lightweight (just

2kg), but it all looks presentable enough. The remote control is a standard IR jobbie, albeit so insubstantial it's just a balloon or two away from a full Pixar *Up* flight to South America. Perhaps Pioneer thinks that people are more likely to use its iControlAV2013 app instead?

The BDP-160 itself presents a somewhat Amish face to the world. The menu is dull to the point of insult and basic when it comes to design. There's only rudimentary Smart online functionality, too. The Web content button is virtually a misnomer, bringing forth just YouTube and Picasa. Pioneer clearly doesn't intend for you to spend a great deal of time streaming with its toy.

Setup takes but a few minutes. For those that need it, there's WPS (Wi-Fi protected

The £130 BDP-160 offers built-in Wi-Fi and Super Audio CD playback





setup) provision for logging onto your network. Once connected, selecting the Home Media Gallery successfully locates whatever DLNA servers you might have lurking on your LAN. File format support, both for audio and video, proves to be comprehensive: AAC/M4A, WAV, FLAC up to 192kHz, MP3, WMA, AVI, MKV, MOV, MP4... this Hungry Hippo consumes them all. On the downside, navigating remote folder structures can seem a tad unintuitive.

The deck's USB media reader is similarly adept, playing MP3s with album art, along with Ogg Vorbis, WMA, APE, WAV, M4A, AIFF, AAC, MKV, WMV and MP4 files. To help make more of lower bitrate audio, Pioneer's Sound Retriever effectively interpolates compressed audio for a more fulsome listening experience.

In more traditional disc-spinning mode, the BDP-160 does a fine job laying down bits and beats. Image quality is exactly what you'd expect of a mass-market machine and is free from self-induced artefacts to spoil the hi-def fun. When the action kicks off in martial arts caper *The Raid*, there's no digital fizz or noise to distract from the fast-paced, low-contrast action. I'd quite happily partner this deck with a projection system or largescreen display. As for 3D, it handshakes with dimensional tellies without incident; Disney's much underrated *Tangled* played out with pristine stereography.

As a hi-fi solution, the BDP-160 passes muster. SACDs delivered over HDMI sound superb, with outstanding fidelity and multi-channel immersion. Conventional CDs bounce along, with impressive two-channel imaging. That said, there's no reason to use the analogue output here over a basic HDMI or coax connection; this is not a deck with audiophile aspirations. Outputting Dolby TrueHD or DTS-HD Master Audio as bitstream over HDMI effectively delegates audio performance to the decoding AV receiver.

If the player does disappoint though, it's with its disc-loading speeds. A simple Java-lite concert BD took 42 seconds from tray to screen, which is positively lethargic, while *The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey* meandered to menu in 50 seconds – which is even slower than its predecessor, the BDP-150. That said, the player runs relatively quietly.

Pioneer's BDP-160 can be considered righteously retro. For traditionalists looking for a competent player that doesn't cock a total snook at their legacy multichannel music collections, it's more than worth considering. And priced at a mere £130, any overt criticism seems churlish; picture quality is excellent for the price. If only Pioneer would brighten up its dour menus, improve loading speeds and perhaps add some VOD. Then we'd all really need a reason not to snap one up ■



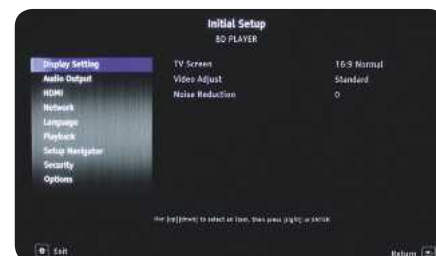
#### AV INFO

**PRODUCT:**  
Entry-level  
Blu-ray player

**POSITION:**  
Sits beneath the  
PQLS-enabled  
BDP-450 and  
armour-plated  
BDP-LX55

**PEERS:**  
Sony BDP-S5100;  
Samsung BD-F6500

#### ON THE MENU



→ Like the player's external design, the BDP-160's user interface is deathly serious – this makes it easy to shuffle between functions, but hardly fun. Navigating DLNA folders is also somewhat unintuitive

#### SPECIFICATIONS

**3D:** Yes

**UPSCALING:** Yes. To 1080p

**MULTIREGION:** No

**CONNECTIONS:** HDMI output; coaxial digital audio; stereo phono outputs; Ethernet; 2 x USB

**SACD/DVD-A:** Yes/No

**DOLBY TRUEHD/DTS-HD DECODING:** Yes

**DOLBY TRUEHD/DTS-HD BITSTREAM:** Yes

**DIMENSIONS:** 435(w) x 58(h) x 250(d)mm

**WEIGHT:** 2kg

**FEATURES:** iOS iControlAV2013 app; Wi-Fi Direct; YouTube and Picasa clients; DLNA media playback compatible with DivX Plus HD, JPEG, MP3, WMA, MP4, MPEG, WMV, FLAC, WAV; 192kHz/24-bit DAC; Sound Retriever Link; Stream Smoother; Digital Media Renderer; Quick Start Mode

#### HCC VERDICT



#### Pioneer BDP-160

→ £130 Approx → [www.pioneer.eu](http://www.pioneer.eu)

→ Tel: 0208 836 3500

**HIGHS:** Super Audio CD compatibility; old-school design; picture quality; broad file compatibility

**LOWS:** Slow disc loading speeds; miserable user interface; token network content

**Performance** ★★★★★

**Design** ★★★★★

**Features** ★★★★★

**Overall** ★★★★★

# Worth your Free Time?

**Grant Rennell** rolls back TV with a low-cost Freesat Free Time box that can be upgraded to enable basic recording and has some useful additional functionality

## FREESAT'S YOUVIEW-ESQUE FREE

Time service with integrated web-delivered video on-demand/catch-up TV currently has three Humax-made boxes to its name, of which this is the latest and cheapest.

Whereas the HDR-1000S and HDR-1010S are PVRs with dual tuners and built-in hard disks, the HB-1000S requires the addition of a USB hard drive for recording and timeshifting, and has only one tuner.

Though not enabled at the time of writing, Humax says it will also be able to act as a

'slave box' in future, allowing recordings located on the HDR boxes to be streamed over a network.

Unlike its distinctive stablemates, it's a compact, fairly nondescript black box with no proper LED display save for a power/standby indicator (a recording indicator would have been welcome) accompanied by a power button. The rear includes HDMI (via which video can be upscaled to 1080p), composite video output, an optical audio output, stereo phonos, an Ethernet connector and two USB

ports. A compatible wireless dongle is needed for Wi-Fi.

The lengthy remote has an attractive glossy black finish and is tapered in the middle so it sits well in the hand. It can also be used to control copious brands of TV (a code list is included in the manual) and frequently-used buttons such as a Home button and PVR controls are located close to each other, making it intuitive to use.

The slick, colourful UI is pretty much the same as that found on the HDR boxes, with

Humax's new Free Time receiver is so small it makes the handset look huge...



### AV INFO

**PRODUCT:**  
Humax HB-1000S

**POSITION:**  
There are currently three Free Time boxes, all made by Humax. The HDR-1000S and 1010S are twin-tuner PVRs

**PEERS:**  
Humax DTR-T1000 (YouView PVR)





a Home screen acting as your main jumping-off point.

### Stepping back in time

By default, the Free Time EPG displays now-and-next programme info, which can be scrolled up and down, either side of which appear Earlier (when you select a Channel 4, 5, BBC or ITV channel, excluding '+1's) and Later options. Earlier takes you to a list of shows available as catch-up TV from the same day or up to seven days previously, the selection of which takes you straight to the relevant player. Choosing Later brings up a conventional EPG grid with information stretching up to eight days ahead.

You can also sort the EPG to show only channels of a particular type, such as Movies, Radio or your favourites. A 'Showcase' menu, meanwhile, displays recommendations for on-demand and live TV and you can perform keyword searches to find upcoming shows by title. BBC iPlayer, ITV Player, Demand 5 and 4oD can also be accessed directly – alongside a YouTube portal – via the Humax's On Demand menu.

Having one tuner is certainly a drawback for recording, restricting you to archiving one channel a time. I was also unable to watch another while doing so unless both were being broadcast using the same satellite transponder. However, this is arguably mitigated somewhat by the catch-up TV content on offer.

You can schedule recordings, including series recordings – and if there's a 'clash', schedule a recording of the next showing – using the EPG, a programme banner (effectively a 'mini EPG' also with Earlier and Later options) via the Showcase and Search menus or by hitting record while watching a channel.

I was able to record with the box in standby, and when playing/streaming media files using players (except ITV Player), YouTube or Humax's TV Portal. You can choose start and end 'padding' times for recordings, start watching while in-progress and resume from where you left off. Both recordings and timeshifted TV can be fast-forwarded or rewound at up to 32x normal speed, or skipped through in chunks helped by a progress bar. Recordings can be kept from deletion but you can't play them using other devices. You can also set programme reminders.

An 'STB mode' enables the box to act as a conventional free-to-air satellite receiver for viewing more than just Freesat channels but functionality is basic – no EPG is provided and you can timeshift but not record.

### Media savvy

Considering the £100 ticket, the HB-1000S packs some welcome extra functionality, beyond its USB recording nous, in the form of multimedia playback via DLNA/USB. Compatible file formats include MP3 and XviD but while the box ably detected my networked PC running Windows 7 and a Western Digital NAS drive, it turned its nose up at some of my MKV files.

Humax's online TV Portal also includes Flickr, Picasa and Wikipedia browsing – but this is really nothing to get excited about.

As for AV quality, the HB-1000S won't work miracles with the often rosey-looking output of some Freesat channels, but the HB-1000S does an effective job on the whole of upscaling SD broadcasts and native HD TV looked suitably sharp and detailed on my Panasonic TV. Some minor jerkiness was evident navigating the UI on my test box, but I didn't experience any recording errors.

If you have, or plan to buy, one of Humax's HDR boxes, then the promise of multiroom functionality to come could be this receiver's big selling point. As things stand, there's enough here to make the HB-1000S worth picking up, either as a 'second room' Freesat box or an affordable introduction to the Free Time platform ■

### ON THE MENU



→ Making attractive use of channel logos and related thumbnail images for shows, like YouView the Free Time EPG has integrated 'roll back' functionality so you can browse what's available on catch-up TV players from the previous seven days from BBC, ITV, Channel 4 and Channel 5

### SPECIFICATIONS

**HDD:** No. USB drive required instead

**TUNER:** Yes. Freesat HD

**CONNECTIONS:** HDMI; composite video output; Ethernet; 2 x USB; optical digital audio output; stereo phono

**DIMENSIONS (ALTER):** 200(w) x 38(h) x 155(d)mm

**FEATURES:** Backwards/forwards EPG; recording via USB; automatic series recording; favourites list; 30-minute timeshift buffer (using USB drive); BBC iPlayer, ITV Player, 4oD, Demand 5, YouTube; TV Portal with Flickr, Picasa, Wiki TV, Wiki How, Teletext Holidays, OK!, Daily Star, Daily Express Film, Daily Express Sport, Daily Express TV, Bible TV, Finance Markets, Vilanoise; media playback from USB drives or DLNA/uPnP-networked storage; Dolby Digital Plus/Pulse support

### HCC VERDICT



#### Humax HB-1000S

→ £100 Approx → [www.humaxdigital.com/uk](http://www.humaxdigital.com/uk)  
→ Tel: 0844 669 8800

**HIGHS:** Versatile Free Time functionality; well-featured USB recording ability; multimedia playback; small form factor

**LOWS:** Single tuner limits recording; Wi-Fi not built-in; TV Portal needs more worthwhile apps

**Performance** ★★★★★

**Design** ★★★★★

**Features** ★★★★★

**Overall** ★★★★★

The sense of drama and excitement is enhanced by the ASB-2's ability to communicate the film's score. This level of musicality is difficult to pull off in a soundbar.

ASB-2  
S O U N D B A R



2.1 SPEAKER SYSTEM • 3D SURROUND EFFECT • 3 HDMI INPUTS • AIRPLAY® • AIRPLAY DIRECT • DLNA®

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# 40/42in TV grouptest

**John Archer** throws five big-name mid-range flatscreens into the *HCC* moshpit. Only the strongest will survive...

## **PANASONIC TX-P42ST60**

£750 plasma 3D TV with My Home Screen user interface

## **PHILIPS 42PFL6188**

Ambilight and Passive 3D are key features of this £850 set

## **SAMSUNG UE40F6400**

£600 gets you a stylish design, Active 3D and plenty of VOD

## **SONY KDL-42W653A**

No 3D here, but Sony's £600 BRAVIA has other talents

## **TOSHIBA 40L6353DB**

This 40-incher packs Cloud TV, yet costs just £450

# Flying the plasma flag

Panasonic's TX-P42ST60 battles its LED rivals courtesy of smooth motion and stable images



**AS USUAL THESE** days, it falls to Panasonic to keep the plasma flag flying in a TV face-off – in this case with the 42in TX-P42ST60.

This is a decent-looking TV by plasma standards, with its glossy black frame, silver trim and metallic desktop stand. But the key words there are 'by plasma standards'. Compared with some of the LCD competition, the TX-P42ST60 looks undeniably chunky.

The connections aren't as numerous as those of some rival models either. The most notable limitation being three HDMI's rather than the more typical four. There's also only one USB, though there's some compensation for this in the shape of an SD card slot.

The TX-P42ST60 offers Panasonic's My Home Screen interface despite being one of the brand's more affordable plasma models. This UI makes organising and finding content really rather easy, as well as enabling different members of your household to set up with minimal difficulty their own customised personal home pages if they want to.

Panasonic delivers a reasonably strong online service combining a range of video streaming and gaming/utility apps. However, it needs to add more video big hitters – like ITV Player, 4OD, Demand 5 and LoveFilm – before it competes with the best systems.

The ST60 series does not feature one of Panasonic's new NeoPlasma 3000 panels, with their startling contrast and brightness. You need to step up to the GT60 series for one of those. But this doesn't prevent the TX-P42ST60 from supporting Active 3D

playback, Panasonic's Intelligent Frame Creation (IFC) motion smoothing system, and a high contrast filter. It also ships with an electronic touchpen so you can draw directly onto the TV's screen. Hmm.

## Feed me your Blu-rays

Images deliver much of the movie-friendly quality I've come to expect from Panasonic's plasmas. But at the same time they lack the punch of Panasonic's NeoPlasma 3000 panels, especially when it comes to 3D and bright-room viewing.

For instance, while watching the usually vibrant *Hugo* in 3D, I was struck by a lack of brightness and colour punch versus the brand's higher-end models. Colours with 3D were also more prone to striping. As for the ambient light issue, if your room is bright the image can lose lustre and dark scenes can take on a green tinge.

A final negative concerns standard-definition pictures. These look slightly rough and ready at times thanks to the TX-P42ST60's less potent processing engine.

From here on in, though, the news is all good. As long as you can control your ambient light levels, the TV's black level response is sensational by mid-range standards, giving dark scenes in *Star Trek: Into Darkness* a beautifully natural feel. There's loads of shadow detail within the blackness, too, while this ability to deliver a deep black means colours in darker sequences look realistic, as well as contributing to what feels like an

immense contrast range. The TX-P42ST60 also delivers handsomely on plasma's innate advantages over LCD displays by enjoying a huge effective viewing angle, avoiding backlight inconsistency, and delivering motion with practically zero blurring.

Peter Jackson's spinning camerawork in *The Hobbit...* uncovers a fair bit of judder in 3D mode, although this is arguably compensated for by the lack of 3D crosstalk ghosting.

While the TX-P42ST60's rather large chassis might not be fashionable by modern standards, it enables an unusually powerful and well-rounded soundstage. And, while not as impressive as some of the brand's step-up PDPs, it's still capable of showing your BD collection a good time for a reasonable price.

## SPECIFICATIONS

**3D:** Yes. Active  
**ULTRA HD:** No. 1,920 x 1,080  
**TUNER:** Yes. Freeview HD  
**CONNECTIONS:** 3 x HDMI; USB; Ethernet; SD card slot; RF input; composite video input; component video input; D-Sub PC port; headphone jack; Scart; optical digital audio out  
**SOUND:** 20W  
**BRIGHTNESS (CLAIMED):** N/A  
**CONTRAST RATIO (CLAIMED):** N/A  
**DIMENSIONS (OFF STAND):** 994(w) x 596(h) x 49(d)mm  
**WEIGHT (OFF STAND):** 17kg  
**FEATURES:** Wi-Fi; colour management; 2,500Hz subfield drive; Infinite Black Pro design; touchpen system; Smart app support; online video streaming services including BBC iPlayer and Netflix; DLNA multimedia support



# X-rated stereoscopy

See beyond Philips' frisky online portal and you get an impressive Passive 3D TV



**WITH ITS ULTRA-SLIM**, well-built and no-nonsense frame, the 42PFL6188 looks like it means business right from the off. The somewhat sombre tone of the main TV chassis is illuminated – literally – by Philips' Ambilight feature, casting coloured light from the TV's sides that can match the content of the image you're watching.

The 42PFL6188's spec sheet seems admirably uncompromising, too. For instance, it carries a Passive 3D engine that cleverly enables two players to enjoy full-screen gaming simultaneously. It also boasts potent image processing, built around a 700Hz-like Perfect Motion Rate system and Philips' Pixel Precise HD engine, which extends its tendrils into almost every part of the TV's image quality.

Pixel Precise HD is not Philips' top-of-the-line video processor, but it's still got more elements than most – many of which you can adjust to suit your tastes. This is a sensible approach, although it does make the 42PFL6188 relatively demanding to use.

The 42PFL6188 also takes its multimedia duties seriously. On its connections roster are four HDMI, three USBs, an Ethernet port and integrated Wi-Fi. The TV can stream video, music and photo files from networked DLNA devices, and go online via a web browser or Philips' 'walled garden' of online content. The latter service is distinguished by two main factors. First, it carries more porn than any other online TV portal. Second, it's pretty lacking in other sorts of content.

The only non-adult video services of note are BBC iPlayer, Blinkbox, YouTube and Netflix, while gaming and utility apps are also few and far between.

## Passive aggression

The Philips' picture quality is strong. Kicking things off is a surprisingly competent black level response by Passive 3D TV standards (many Passive 3D TVs this year have struggled to deliver a believable black colour). Dark scenes like Deckard's showdown with Batty in *Blade Runner* are thus comfortable and natural to watch, and enjoy more authentic colours. Furthermore, the 42PFL6188's good black level performance is unspoiled by serious light clouding or inconsistency.

There's a little shadow detail loss as the TV's over-aggressive dynamic contrast system wrestles with the set's edge LED lighting to produce such a convincing black colour, but I still prefer the 42PFL6188's results to the milky appearance of dark scenes witnessed on many rival Passive 3D screens.

Colours look punchy and clean for most of the time, and HD pictures appear sharp and richly textured. In fact, they can look a bit too sharp using the default settings, tipping over into noise – deactivating the Active Sharpness tool largely resolves this issue. Motion is fine, although again care is needed with the TV's settings to get the best results. The Natural Motion system on its higher levels can cause distracting processing glitches, so you should approach it with caution.

## SPECIFICATIONS

**3D:** Yes. Passive

**ULTRA HD:** No. 1,920 x 1,080

**TUNER:** Yes. Freeview HD

**CONNECTIONS:** 4 x HDMI; 3 x USB; Ethernet; RF input; composite video input; component video input; D-Sub PC port; headphone jack; Scart; optical digital audio out

**SOUND:** 20W

**BRIGHTNESS (CLAIMED):** 400cd/m<sup>2</sup>

**CONTRAST RATIO (CLAIMED):** 500,000:1

**DIMENSIONS (OFF STAND):** 953(w) x 556(h) x 32.5(d)mm

**WEIGHT (OFF STAND):** 19kg

**FEATURES:** Wi-Fi; 700Hz motion system; dual-screen gaming feature; Ambilight; Pixel Precise HD processing; noise reduction system; Smart TV online services including BBC iPlayer, Netflix and Skype; DLNA multimedia support

With 3D the TV continues to impress. The Passive engine precludes the crosstalk problem of Active 3D panels (so long as you keep your vertical viewing angle down), while the relatively small 42in screen weakens the impact of the format's reduced detailing. The brightness and colour richness of the 42PFL6188's 3D images makes them look pleasingly crisp, actually.

Pictures aren't flawless, however. Black levels are bettered elsewhere in this group, and fine areas of detail occasionally exhibit moiré noise. Input lag is higher than I'd like at 66ms too, which could impact your gaming. Still, with its pictures joined by some decent sonics, the 42PFL6188 is a reminder that Philips remains a potent TV force.

# Affordable and stylish

Samsung's £600 set has a lot going for it – and that's before you even switch it on...



**AS IS CUSTOMARY** for a mid-range Samsung TV these days, the UE40F6400 packs a combination of aggressive pricing and high-level specification that should have its rivals quaking in their boots. If they were wearing any.

The UE40F6400 looks flash for a 40in TV costing just £600. Its bezel is slim, given added panache by a transparent outer trim. Its gleaming, X-shaped desktop stand looks classy for such an affordable TV, and – unlike some budget rivals – it orients the majority of its connections for side access, making it easier to wall mount.

These connections, which include a quartet of HDMI, three USBs and built-in Ethernet and Wi-Fi network options, are as good as on TVs costing much more. Those network options enable streaming of video, photo and music files from DLNA PCs, or access to Samsung's latest Smart TV system. This is currently the most advanced in the TV world, partly on account of the huge quantity of available content that includes, uniquely, all of the UK's key catchup services (BBC iPlayer, ITV Player, 4OD and Demand 5) as well as Netflix, LoveFilm and Blinkbox, among numerous more niche but still useful video streaming services. Factor in the S-Recommendation system that points you toward content you may like based on an assessment of your viewing history, and the voice control system for streamlining searching or removing the need for a physical remote, and you have a Smart TV worthy of the name.

## Panel beater

Despite only costing £600 the UE40F6400 carries Active 3D playback – unlike Sony's similarly priced KDL-42W653A. It's also able to deliver a respectable 200Hz-like panel driving system. Inevitably, the panel at the UE40F6400's heart isn't of the same high-grade as those used in Samsung's F7000 and F8000 TVs. But it quickly becomes clear that it's good enough to perform well by the standards of the £600 40-42in market.

The UE40F6400 makes an immediate impact on your senses courtesy of its vibrant, colour-rich and bright pictures, which dominate your field of view even if you're watching in a well-lit room. And, unlike most other relatively cheap TVs that put a premium on image punch, the Samsung also delivers a natural, subtly-toned colour palette; the notoriously tricky range of skin tones on show throughout the heavily filtered and almost unrelentingly dark scenes of the final *Harry Potter*... film always look believable.

That the UE40F6400's colours remain natural during dark scenes reveals another of its strengths: an excellent contrast range. The set doesn't employ any sort of local dimming system, yet a combination of the panel's innately black level performance, together with Samsung's clever dynamic contrast/backlight controls, produces remarkably rich, deep blacks that infuse dark scenes with realism.

HD images are sharp and detailed, and the sharpness holds up well during motion-heavy scenes, such as the climactic battle with the

## SPECIFICATIONS

**3D:** Yes. Active  
**ULTRA HD:** No. 1,920 x 1,080  
**TUNER:** Yes. Freeview HD  
**CONNECTIONS:** 4 x HDMI; 3 x USB; Ethernet; RF input; composite video input; component video input; D-Sub PC port; headphone jack; Scart; optical digital audio out  
**SOUND:** 20W  
**BRIGHTNESS (CLAIMED):** N/A  
**CONTRAST RATIO (CLAIMED):** N/A  
**DIMENSIONS (OFF STAND):** 928.1(w) x 543.8(h) x 49.6(d)mm  
**WEIGHT (OFF STAND):** 9.3kg  
**FEATURES:** Wi-Fi; 200Hz motion system; S-Recommendation system; voice control technology; DLNA multimedia support; Smart TV online services including BBC iPlayer, Netflix, LoveFilm, ITV Player, 4OD, Demand 5 and Skype

aliens in *Avengers Assemble*. The panel has a good response time for its price point.

The UE40F6400 isn't as dynamic or bold with its images as more expensive LED sets, and its standard-def upscaling struggles to suppress noise. 3D pictures exhibit a some crosstalk ghosting noise, too. However, the SD pictures are still watchable, and the stereoscopic visuals are more bright, vibrant, detailed and immersive than I would expect for the money.

With even the UE40F6400's audio performance sounding adequately clear and punchy, it's fair to say Samsung's flatscreen is surely going to be involved in the final discussions of which TV has come out on top of this group test...



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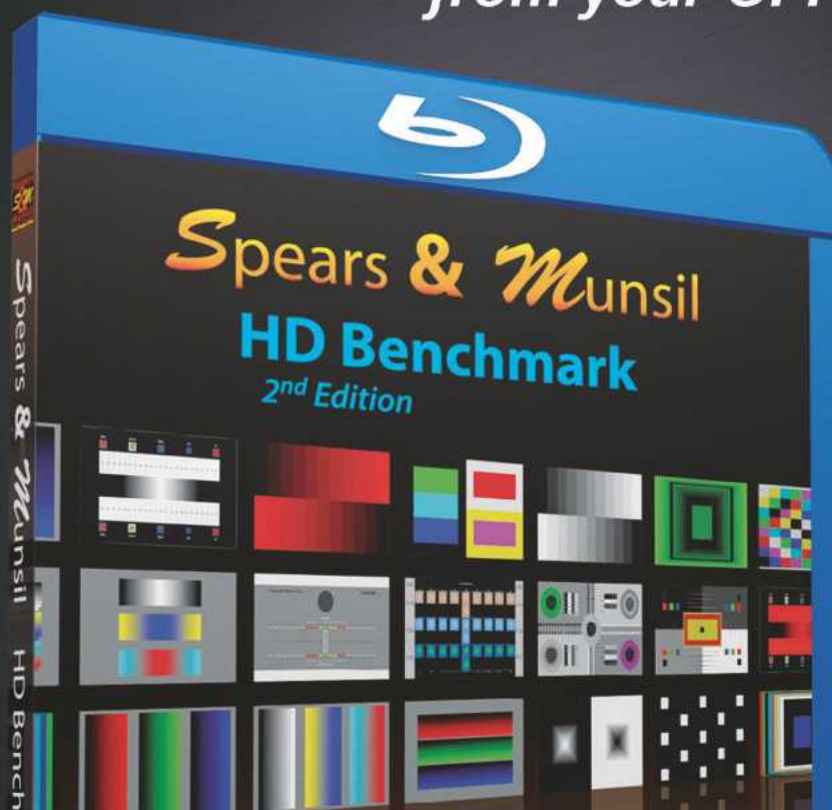
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# If you don't want 3D...

...or more than two HDMI inputs, Sony's 42-incher could be right up your street



**SONY HAS BEEN** on good form at the top end of its TV range this year, with stunners like its 4K-resolution X9005A series and gorgeous Triluminos W905A Full HD models. The job of the KDL-42W653A, therefore, is to prove that the brand has been able to filter some of its high-end prowess down to the more affordable parts of its range. This 42in TV costs a mere £600.

Straight away I'm torn about the KDL-42W653A's looks. Its frame is fashionably slim and its slender stand is elegant, but there's something a little unimaginative and cheap-feeling about other aspects of its build quality and appearance. There's a budgety shock in store with its connections, too – you only get two HDMI inputs and one USB, which will annoy many buyers. On the upside, the KDL-42W653A provides both Ethernet and integrated Wi-Fi, and can access files stored on networked DLNA PCs as well as online content courtesy of the Sony Entertainment Network.

The SEN is one of the better TV online systems thanks to its focus on video streaming – the sort of content that always seems best suited to a TV environment. Among the services at your disposal are Netflix, LoveFilm, Sony's Video Unlimited platform, BBC iPlayer, BBC News, BBC Sport, Demand 5, Crackle, Sky News and Sony Entertainment Television, with the only serious omissions being ITV Player and 4OD.

The Smart interface is rather primitive in some ways – but at least you don't need to be a rocket scientist to use it.

Aside from the reduced connectivity, the most obvious signs of corner-cutting here are an inability to show 3D, and the application of a 200Hz engine rather than the 800Hz one found on Sony's flagships.

You do still get the X-Reality Pro processing engine, which draws on a vast database of video content 'types' to shortcut the process of picking the best settings to use with whatever you happen to be watching. This system is especially effective when watching low-quality content, like YouTube video streams.

## Master of the dark arts

X-Reality Pro also plays a part in helping the Sony's pictures look very good for such an affordable set. Dark scenes are particularly strong versus similarly priced rivals, as the TV produces a black level response of impressive depth – beyond anything Sony's own step-up W805A series manage, in my opinion.

There's no significant backlight inconsistency to spoil the show, and perhaps best of all dark scenes contain a good amount of shadow detail, avoiding a hollow look.

Colours lack the lush richness experienced with Sony's 2013 Triluminos models, but they're still subtle in blend and natural in tone, and don't lose their integrity during low-lit footage or when watching standard-def.

There are other TVs in this group that look slightly sharper when showing HD – partly because the KDL-42W653A exhibits a little motion blur at times. But Blu-rays still

look undeniably sharp, and some AV fans might well prefer Sony's gentler approach to the forensic sharpness offered by some rivals.

One slightly strange thing about the KDL-42W653A's pictures is that they don't seem as bright as usual for an LED/LCD screen, making it perhaps not the best choice for a really bright room. It also falls into the average camp sonically, lacking the bass oomph to sound convincing with massive action scenes like the battle for Minas Tirith towards the end of *LOTR: The Return of the King*.

Despite these issues, the KDL-42W653A remains a superior set for £600, as long as you don't want 3D. And research suggests you probably don't.

## SPECIFICATIONS

**3D:** No  
**ULTRA HD:** No. 1,920 x 1,080  
**TUNER:** Yes. Freeview HD  
**CONNECTIONS:** 2 x HDMI; USB; Ethernet; RF input; composite video input; component video input; D-Sub PC port; headphone jack; Scart; optical digital audio out  
**SOUND:** 16W  
**BRIGHTNESS (CLAIMED):** N/A  
**CONTRAST RATIO (CLAIMED):** Over 1 million:1  
**DIMENSIONS (OFF STAND):** 954(w) x 568(h) x 69(d)mm  
**WEIGHT (OFF STAND):** 9.9kg  
**FEATURES:** Wi-Fi; MotionFlow XR 200Hz motion system; X-Reality Pro processing; online features including BBC iPlayer, Netflix, Demand 5, LoveFilm and Sony Movies and Music Unlimited; DLNA file playback





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# Value for money flatscreen

Toshiba's 40in Smart TV will leave you change from £500 – so what's the catch?



**AS I'M COMING** to expect from Toshiba, the 40L6353DB scores an early advantage over its rivals by costing much less than any of them. At £450 it's hard to believe that Toshiba's contender can really be a mid-range model. But it is, with the features and specifications to prove it.

From a distance, at least, it even looks the mid-range part with its reasonably svelte black frame and backside, given a little flare courtesy of a strip of silver along the bottom. Closer inspection reveals a rather flimsy build quality, but from a normal viewing distance it easily passes muster.

Connections are up to scratch. Highlights are four HDMI's, two USBs, Ethernet and built-in Wi-Fi. Use either of the latter to enter Toshiba's Cloud TV online service. This introduces a new multi-hub layout and some intriguing new features, including a 'Cloud' calendar you can share across iOS devices, an on-tablet/phone TV listings system, advanced content search options, and a friendly avatar-based programme recommendations system. There are also some bad things, though, such as a comically uncensored Twitter feed showing hashtag threads of the current three most trending TV shows. Other issues are the lack of video streaming services available (you just get Netflix, BBC iPlayer, Blinkbox and KnowHow Movies), and the sluggishness and instability of the operating system.

The 40L6353DB's tech tricks include 100Hz processing, edge LED lighting and

a startlingly extensive array of picture calibration tools, including colour, white balance and gamma correction. You don't, however, get 3D playback.

## Breaking through the mist

Starting off by examining that most common of affordable TV failings, black level response, it looks at first as if the 40L6353DB's decent spec has paid off nicely. There's certainly not as much grey mist over the murky sequences of Peter Jackson's *The Hobbit*... as I had expected. And, provided you reduce the set's backlight from its default positions, you also don't have to suffer too much backlight clouding/inconsistency.

However, the 40L6353DB's dynamic contrast system is rather rudimentary, causing too many distracting brightness 'leaps' if you leave it active. Turn it off, though, and images look markedly less dynamic. The 40L6353DB isn't particularly successful at reproducing shadow details either, leaving dark picture areas looking slightly flat.

After calibration, the Toshiba's pictures are also less bright than those of today's rival brands (except perhaps the Sony). Meanwhile, standard-definition images look a bit soft and noisy, and while the rapid camera pans in *The Hobbit*... aren't handled too badly in terms of motion blur, the set does exhibit fairly significant judder, specially if you're watching in Blu-ray's native 24p mode.

On a more positive note, the 40L6353DB's colours are well rendered and naturalistic,

sharpness levels with hi-def sources are high, and – provided you can limit the amount of light in your room – pictures can still look quite dynamic despite their lack of post-calibration brightness, thanks to the TV's rich colour saturations.

As for audio, the Toshiba's 20W speaker array sounds adequate considering how crazily cheap the TV is. It can certainly go surprisingly loud before the speakers start to strain, and vocals are well-rounded.

What this all adds up to is a TV that's definitely worth considering if £450 is as far as you can comfortably stretch. The quality on offer elsewhere in this group test makes it tough for the 40L6353DB to earn an unqualified recommendation, however.

## SPECIFICATIONS

**3D:** No  
**ULTRA HD:** No, 1,920 x 1,080  
**TUNER:** Yes, Freeview HD  
**CONNECTIONS:** 4 x HDMI; 2 x USB; Ethernet; RF input; composite video input; component video input; D-Sub PC port; headphone jack; Scart; optical digital audio out  
**SOUND:** 20W  
**BRIGHTNESS (CLAIMED):** 300cd/m2  
**CONTRAST RATIO (CLAIMED):** 5,000:1 (native)  
**DIMENSIONS (OFF STAND):** 922(w) x 544(h) x 69(d)mm  
**WEIGHT (OFF STAND):** 5.8kg  
**FEATURES:** Wi-Fi; AMR 100Hz motion system; Resolution+ processing; online features including BBC iPlayer, Netflix, Blinkbox and Skype; DLNA file playback



# Final standings

**ALTHOUGH MANY OF** us are shifting focus to larger screens, there are advantages to the 40/42in format. Firstly, such TVs are now remarkably cheap – save money here and you have more to lavish on the rest of your setup. Secondly, 40/42in is still big enough to reveal the joys of the HD format in a normal-sized room. Thirdly, there's quality to be found...

All five of the models tested here have something going for them and would make agreeable home cinema companions.

We have arrived at a final pecking order, though, and bringing up the rear is Toshiba's 40L6353DB. This feels a little mean-spirited, given that Toshiba's set is significantly cheaper than the other four – so let's make it clear that it's a good all-round performer for its price level. However, both its online features and picture quality can be improved upon if you can up your budget.

In fourth place is Philips' 42PFL6188. Again this feels a bit harsh given that it's one of only a few Passive 3D TVs we've seen this year that manages to deliver a good contrast performance. Yet it doesn't do enough to justify its relatively high £850 asking

price – especially given its severe lack of online content.

In third is Sony's KDL-42W653A. This offers a good all-round picture performance and decent amount of online functionality for a good price. It doesn't have 3D, though, and its smart interface is a bit basic.

Picking between the Panasonic TX-P42ST60 and Samsung UE40F6400 is tough. If you really love movies and are prepared to watch them in relatively dark conditions, then Panasonic's plasma technology delivers contrast and colours to die for.

However, we've ultimately given top spot to Samsung's more affordable (but admittedly two inches smaller) set. This combines great LED picture quality with a neat design and an unparalleled range of Smart features.

## HCC VERDICT



### Panasonic TX-P42ST60

→ £750 Approx → [www.panasonic.co.uk](http://www.panasonic.co.uk) → Tel: 0844 844 3852

**HIGHS:** Superior contrast performance; crosstalk-free 3D; excellent operating system

**LOWS:** Loses picture impact in bright rooms; average design; a tad expensive

Performance ★★★★★

Design ★★★★★

Features ★★★★★

Overall ★★★★★

## HCC VERDICT



### Philips 42PFL6188

→ £850 Approx → [www.philips.co.uk](http://www.philips.co.uk) → Tel: 0844 338 0488

**HIGHS:** Strong all-round picture performance; powerful design; above average sonics

**LOWS:** Impoverished Smart TV system; expensive; demanding setup

Performance ★★★★★

Design ★★★★★

Features ★★★★★

Overall ★★★★★

## HCC VERDICT



### Samsung UE40F6400

→ £600 Approx → [www.samsung.co.uk](http://www.samsung.co.uk) → Tel: 0330 726 7864

**HIGHS:** Excellent 2D pictures; content-rich Smart TV platform; stylish; great value

**LOWS:** UI can confuse initially; quite a lot of judder with 3D; SD noise

Performance ★★★★★

Design ★★★★★

Features ★★★★★

Overall ★★★★★

## HCC VERDICT



### Sony KDL-42W653A

→ £600 Approx → [www.sony.co.uk](http://www.sony.co.uk) → Tel: 0844 846 6555

**HIGHS:** Natural, contrast-rich pictures; good price; above par online service

**LOWS:** No 3D; slightly basic Smart interface; only two HDMI; not particularly bright

Performance ★★★★★

Design ★★★★★

Features ★★★★★

Overall ★★★★★

## HCC VERDICT



### Toshiba 40L6353DB

→ £450 Approx → [www.toshiba.co.uk](http://www.toshiba.co.uk) → Tel: 0871 495 0730

**HIGHS:** Above-par pictures for its price point; decent calibration options; some clever Smart TV touches

**LOWS:** Picture quality bettered elsewhere; sluggish interface; no 3D

Performance ★★★★★

Design ★★★★★

Features ★★★★★

Overall ★★★★★



Samsung's UE40F6400 offers a great all-round performance, cat-walk looks and plenty of features, including the content-heavy Smart platform (left)

# A case of evolution not revolution

**Martin Pipe** sounds out a new mid-range AVR from Yamaha and likes its sonic prowess – but wonders at the thinking behind its 'virtual surround' mode...



## AV INFO

### PRODUCT:

7.2 AV receiver with network functionality

### POSITION:

Entry-level in the Aventure range – a step-up up from the RX-V models

### PEERS:

Onkyo TX-NR828; Denon AVR-X4000; Pioneer SC-LX56

**THE 7.2-CHANNEL RX-A830** replaces a similar model – the RX-A820. Previously reviewed in *HCC*, that also benefitted from Yamaha's elite Aventure design programme (and sophisticated black styling). In fact, the changes here are subtle – there's been no radical overhaul for Yamaha in 2013.

A key difference between the two is that the front-panel HDMI port now supports the MHL (Mobile High-definition Link) protocol. This is intended to give the RX-A830 more appeal to the tech-savvy crowd. If your smartphone has MHL HDMI connectivity, the RX-A830 will let you experience whatever Full HD video and multichannel/stereo audio you have stored on it. Another refinement is greater support for high-definition audio files stored on USB sticks and network servers.

iPad owners now also get digital docking (i.e. transfer of audio via USB) and display of song titles. Yamaha has also added a 'virtual surround' DSP mode, which is apparently based on technology built into its array of soundbars. Its purpose is to offer believable

multichannel sonics from just the front speakers. This strikes me as a rather odd decision on Yamaha's part, considering that multichannel AV receivers are intended to drive a full set of speakers, thereby recreating cinematic sound authentically.

Finally, Yamaha tells me that the electronics 'under the bonnet' have been re-routed and tweaked to yield an improved sound quality.

### Net-savvy

The RX-A830 is supported by a free Wi-Fi control app that runs on iOS and Android smartphones. Yet the receiver does not itself embrace Wi-Fi; you'll need an optional dongle for that. Out of the box, you can connect it to your network's router via Ethernet. Get the RX-A830 online and you can indulge in other network tricks – 'net radio, playback of audio (but not video or pics) from DLNA or Apple AirPlay servers and Napster subscription music. A firmware update has also added support for Spotify Connect.



Yamaha's good-looking handset is packed with buttons



Going in the opposite direction tech-wise are a phono input for your turntable, and a 40-preset FM/AM tuner with support for RDS. Well, this is a receiver...

The RX-A830 also caters for bread-and-butter home cinema. It handles hi-res DTS/Dolby Digital from Blu-ray, together with the older standards that underpin DVD, and matrixed two-channel surround formats (among them, Pro-Logic IIx). And, this being a Yamaha product, you get a selection of venue-simulating and application-specific DSPs (which can be manipulated to suit your tastes), plus an effective compressed music enhancer. Full marks too, for the AVR's four programmable 'Scene' one-touch shortcut buttons, which may come in useful for household members daunted by the otherwise jam-packed remote.

## 'The full excitement of *Oblivion*'s Blu-ray audio was conveyed with precision-engineered steering'

The rear panel provides seven HDMI inputs – all of which support DSD, 4K, 3D and standby-passthrough. There are two outputs, one of which supports ARC.

The RX-A830's graphical user interface covers configuration: speaker settings; lip-sync delay; how the amps should be configured (you can, for example, combine a 5.1 rig with 'zone 2' speakers or bi-amped fronts if you don't want 7.1 with rear-surround speakers or 'front surround'); which audio source you want to partner with a specific video source; whether video should be upscaled (to 4K if need be...), network matters; and so on. It's hardly the most glamorous UI around, though – a revamp would be welcome.

Some installation is automated. Position the supplied microphone in your listening/viewing position, plug into the front-panel input and the latest incarnation of the YPAO

(Yamaha Parametric Acoustic Optimiser) system then 'sound outs' your room and applies what it deems the necessary correction. Manual setup is possible, and you will undoubtedly find yourself having a fiddle in here.

### Put to the test

I began my audition with stereo music, and noted a trace of mid-band warmth that can colour vocals; although the trickery-bypassing Pure Direct mode reduces the effect I felt it was never completely eliminated. That said, using Pure Direct did result in a more revealing, detailed performance. 24-bit/192kHz FLAC and WAV files, meanwhile, showed the Yamaha's clarity. The AVR's DSP has its advantages, too – the venue-simulating modes can add compelling (although obviously artificial) presence to your tunes.

The true value of an AVR, however, lies in its ability to envelope you with sound when watching movies – and that's where the RX-A830 really scores. With my Rogers speaker system and Cambridge Audio 751BD, the full excitement of *Oblivion* on Blu-ray was conveyed with precision-engineered steering. As Tom Cruise's bubble ship rotated towards the ground in Chapter 2, the soundstage followed the action with the speakers firing accordingly. Even more dynamic sequences, such as the hydro-rig detonation in Chapter 5 (a good test for your sub!) and Chapter 11's drone chase through a barely-recognisable New York, proved to be equally immersive and spine-tingling – especially as the Yamaha's sound was seldom if ever compromised by fatigue or glassiness, even at high volume levels in my modest-sized viewing room. Indeed, the power plant, which Yamaha rates at 130W per channel (8 ohms), appeared bottomless. And subtler scenes, including the visit to the secret lakeside retreat in Chapter 5, again demonstrated the RX-A830's strong detailing capabilities, with the soundscape filled with delicate ambient effects.

Overall, this is a punchy, precise and authoritative movie machine, with a nice side-channel in network audio and generous HDMI connectivity. These reasons alone make it worth auditioning ■

The second HDMI port can send video to another zone



### ON THE MENU



→ While the RX-A830's graphical user interface is fairly straightforward, it's in need of a hi-res polish – some may prefer the slicker experience provided by Yamaha's iOS/Android app controller (pictured)

### SPECIFICATIONS

**DOLBY TRUEHD:** Yes. Plus Pro-Logic IIx  
**DTS-HD MASTER AUDIO:** Yes  
**THX:** No  
**MULTICHANNEL INPUT:** No (but 7.2 pre-out available)  
**MULTICHANNEL OUTPUT (CLAIMED):** 7 x 130W (8 ohm)  
**MULTIROOM:** Yes. Zone 2  
**AV INPUTS:** 5 x composite; 4 x digital audio (2 x optical and 2 x coaxial)  
**HDMI:** 8 x inputs; 2 x outputs  
**COMPONENT VIDEO:** 2 x inputs; 1 x output  
**VIDEO UPSCALING:** Yes. To 4K  
**DIMENSIONS:** 435(w) x 369(d) x 171(h)mm  
**WEIGHT:** 10.5kg  
**ADDITIONAL FEATURES:** Aventure design; Apple iOS and Android control apps; media playback via USB or Ethernet; Apple iPod/iPad/iPhone support via USB; 'net radio; Napster, Spotify and AirPlay; MHL support; hi-def (192kHz/24-bit) FLAC and WAV compatibility; 17 Yamaha DSP modes; compressed music enhancer; YPAO auto-calibration; four Scene modes; FM/AM tuner; power-saving eco mode; phono input for turntables; RS232 port; Silent DSP for headphone listening; 'virtual presence' mode (for 3D sound without 'presence' speakers); Pure Direct

### HCC VERDICT



#### Yamaha RX-A830

→ £900 Approx → <http://uk.yamaha.com>  
 → Tel: 0844 811 1116

**HIGHS:** Excellent movie performance; good connectivity including MHL; networked audio and hi-res file support

**LOWS:** Traces of 'boxiness' spoil music listening; wireless is an optional extra; no Pro-Logic IIz mode; UI needs a revamp

Performance ★★★★★

Design ★★★★★

Features ★★★★★

Overall ★★★★★

# A hybrid audio solution

Q Acoustics' active stereo speaker pair is an alternative to a soundbar. **Adrian Justins** reports

## ACTIVE BOOKSHELF

**LOUDSPEAKERS** are an unorthodox alternative to a soundbar. But, assuming you have room for them on or near your TV, there is an obvious advantage in that no compromise has been made to size or shape. And while they look more retro than Gene Hunt sipping a Babycham, their innards are distinctly cutting-edge, with a 50W per-channel power amplifier (in the right speaker), aptX-compatible Bluetooth and a low-distortion DAC. Wired connections run to optical audio, stereo phono and 3.5mm analogue stereo line-level inputs, plus a sub output. Each speaker has a 1in tweeter and 4in midrange/bass unit.

TV viewing is substantially improved when using the optical hookup. With ITV's cycling coverage I could comfortably hear the commentary whilst identifying the switch from helicopters to motorbikes, with the sound of



spectators' cheering coming through. Delivery is smoother than Bradley Wiggins' time trialling action. Muttered dialogue in dramas such as *Veep* benefits hugely from the extra clarity whilst Blu-ray and DVD playback is punchy and

dynamic. *The Incredibles* soundtrack is deftly handled with the subtle details of Bob Parr's office activity contrasting with the high-pitched buzzing of the machines chasing Dash through the jungle. And musically, these speakers deliver too – Lady Ga Ga's mezzo-soprano tones of *You and I* effortlessly filled my room, showcasing a nicely full-range and fulsome sound.

The Q-BT3 does what its makers intend, being both a neat sonic upgrade for a TV and doubling up brilliantly for stereo music. Bit pricey, though.

## HCC VERDICT

Q Acoustics Q-BT3 → £400

Overall ★★★★★

## PHILIPS PPX3610 → Approx £350

# Want to put a projector in your pocket?

**Martin Pipe** does exactly that

**MEASURING A MERE** 105 x 105 x 31.5mm, Philips' PPX3610 is among the latest LED-backlit pico projectors. Compared with today's big boys, it's rather limited in resolution (854 x 480, i.e. standard-def widescreen) and brightness (100 Lumens). But in other respects this 284g pocketable miracle goes beyond the average home cinema projector. For a start, its in-built rechargeable battery yields up to two hours of untethered operation, although brightness drops below 60 Lumens.

Oh, and there's Android. Version 2.3.1 may not be cutting-edge, but this PJ nevertheless gives you 802.11b/g/n Wi-Fi, a powerful DLNA/USB/SD media player/server, document-reader, 4GB of internal storage, YouTube and web browser. The media player handled every video file I threw at it – even 1080p MKV files were game, although downscaled to the projector's resolution.

A small in-built speaker is quiet, but sounds surprisingly good. Headphones can be used

instead; the relevant socket could also drive audio gear. An HDMI cable is supplied for the Philips' input, but you'll need to add your own for the 3.5mm analogue jack.

On top of the projector is a thumbwheel that focuses the image. I obtained a sharp, dynamic and vivid 30in image from 50cm away; increasing the projection distance rewarded me with a worthwhile 40in display. Go beyond this, though, and the limited brightness reserves become apparent. Philips claims a maximum 120in image.

The PPX3610's big limitation is its touchpanel interface, which wasn't responsive at times. Use a USB keyboard to enter YouTube searches and Wi-Fi passwords instead. The DLP rainbow effect is in evidence, too.



The PPX3610 doubles as a media player

Overall, though I really loved using this little PJ, which has dozens of everyday applications. And surely an HD model can't be that far off?

## HCC VERDICT

Philips PPX3610 → £350

Overall ★★★★★





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# Control with compromises

**Adrian Justins** takes a break from wrestling with multiple handsets to wrestle with a premium all-in-one zapper – and discovers that it can't quite do everything that he wants

**THE KAMELEON IS** back, kind of. Ten years since One For All made the final version of its appearance-changing universal remote, the concept has been resurrected in the guise of the Infinity (aka the URC-7990 in black and the URC-7991 in white). The new handset refines the original multi-purpose electroluminescent keypad, calling it Smart Screen, and adds innovations such as gesture control and the optional operation of several devices from the same display.

Also, the size is more compact and the shape more ergonomic. The Infinity's keypad is nicely tactile with mostly decent-sized keys that aren't cramped but some keys are tiny and one or two (eg volume, TV source) are awkwardly placed too close to the edge.

Simply picking up the Infinity should bring it to life, or you can press any button. The default mode is TV operation, with options for up to five other devices. Each device has multiple screens, accessed by either shaking the remote or pressing the appropriate device key.

There are various ways of setting up the Infinity. I had no problem with Direct Code setup, getting it to control a Samsung 46E8000 screen and Sky+ HD PVR by following a given sequence, including entering the codes listed in the supplied booklet. It was deflating, though, to find that codes are given

for DVD decks but not Blu-ray players, so I tried Auto Search, where I waited for the Infinity to try all the Sony DVD codes. No dice there, so on to the SimpleSet website, using a USB connection to a computer. Happily, a recommended code appeared, which worked fine, although I couldn't find a key for ejecting the disc



The Infinity can control up to six devices

tray. The solution was to copy the eject code to the Infinity by aiming one handset at the other (I allocated an unused button on the secondary DVD keypad screen). This is fine for the odd function but somewhat laborious, and copying an entire device would be as much fun as navigating the M25 on a wet Friday afternoon.

SimpleSet was also essential for finding the code for my Onkyo AVR, which I allocated as the Audio device. Because the Audio keypad is designed more for a playback device than a feature-rich AV amplifier, the number of commands available was frustratingly limited. All I could usefully do was change volume level.

Furthermore, the multi-screen approach can lead to annoyance over the time spent searching for certain keys. On the other hand, SmartControl is a great feature and easy to initiate. Decide which devices you want for each of three activities (TV, movies, music) and the same screen will, for example, change channel on a Sky box but adjust volume on your AVR.

## A convenient choice

Overall this a decent compromise between the familiarity and logic of your own remotes and the convenience and tidiness of having just one handset. But you'll want to keep those original zappers within easy reach for the odd occasion when the Infinity can't cope, and if you can live without the fancy Smart Screen and only have four devices to drive, the same brand's £25 Simple 4 remote might be a better purchase ■

## SPECIFICATIONS

**FEATURES:** 5.6in fingerprint-proof, electroluminescent panel; SmartControl modes – Watch TV, Watch Movie, Listen to Music; controls up to six different devices; compatible with more than 300,000 devices from over 6,000 manufacturers; partial gesture control; requires 4 x AAA batteries (not supplied); mini USB cable supplied for optional online setup

**SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS:** Any Mac or PC using Firefox, Google, Chrome, Safari or Internet Explorer to use SimpleSet online setup

**DIMENSIONS:** 50(w) x 194(h) x 16(d)mm  
**WEIGHT:** 167g

## AV INFO

**PRODUCT:** Universal remote control

**POSITIONING:** Flagship product in a 24-strong range

**PEERS:** Philips Prestigio SRT9320; Logitech Harmony Ultimate; One For All XSight Touch

## HCC VERDICT

### One For All Infinity

→ £90 Approx → [www.oneforall.com](http://www.oneforall.com)

→ Tel: 0203 024 81 59

**HIGHS:** Good ergonomics; decent keypad layout; handy SmartControl feature; great value

**LOWS:** Variable success setting up; basic AVR control; unconvincing gesture control

**Performance** ★★★★★

**Design** ★★★★★

**Features** ★★★★★

**Overall** ★★★★★



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# Bigscreen 3D on a budget

An HD-ready 3D projector for only £500? **Steve May** is so quids-in with BenQ's money-saving W750 that he's prepared to overlook a few niggles

**WITH A PRICE** tag of just £500, BenQ's W750 arrives with value writ large upon it. A 3D-capable model (but not supplied with glasses) with a long-life lamp, only its native 1,280 x 720 resolution should give canny buyers pause for thought.

Looking much like the brand's other budget PJs, the W750 has a neat white/dark grey finish and, at just 325mm wide and 114mm tall, is easy to squirrel away. Typically it's the sort of white-wall projector you'll pop onto a coffee table when you want to watch a movie or frag friends.

Connectivity is generous. You get two HDMI, component, phono AV, S-Video (still!), PC VGA D-Sub (with resolution support up to 1,600 x 1,200 UXGA, resized), plus RS232 control. This pretty much covers off all source possibilities, although HDMI is likely to be all you'll end up using.

There's an onboard monophonic sound system, rated at 10W. It serves a purpose when you just need some sonic feedback, but don't expect anything other than a squawk.

Set up is straightforward. The W750's menu system is easy to navigate and in addition to basic image tweakery for sharpness, brightness and the like, offers colour management, gamma adjustment and white

balance calibration options. In truth, I'm not sure I'd bother as its out-of-the-box performance is pretty darn good. Picture presets include Standard, Cinema, Dynamic (which is suitably hideous) and two user-defined modes. The latter can be renamed, which is a nice touch.

## AV INFO

**PRODUCT:** Entry-level 720p 3D-ready projector

**POSITIONING:** Aimed at gamers and casual users, it sits beneath BenQ's Full HD W1080ST

**PEERS:** Epson EH-TW490; Acer P1273B



## BenQ's W750 is aimed at casual users

Manual zoom and focus controls are provided on-body, along with a top-mounted menu pad. The throw ratio, 1.31-1.57, is suitable for smaller rooms, casting an image of around 60in from two metres.

## Brightly does it

The image from the W750, rated at 2,500 ANSI Lumens, is extremely bright. Although best suited for black-out conditions, you'll be able to get away with viewing in some ambient light. BenQ quotes a contrast ratio of 13,000:1.

Unsurprisingly, fine detail is compromised by the projector's native resolution. Blacks aren't particularly deep either, which inevitably leads to a loss of shadow detail. That said, there's still big thrills to be had. *The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey* remains hugely cinematic, the rich hues of Peter Jackson's epic delivered well. When dwarves war with Orcs, the image thrown by this modest light-canon seems suitably epic.

As you might expect of a single-chip DLP projector, there's a low level of colour fringing evident on scenes of high contrast, although this rainbow effect isn't distractingly overt and doesn't occur frequently enough to pull you out of the image.

In short this, those seeking a cut-price cinema solution should definitely shortlist the W750. The price tag may reflect the model's 720p limitations, but its overall performance gets a thumbs up ■

## SPECIFICATIONS

**3D:** Yes. Triple-Flash active shutter 3D

**ULTRA HD:** No. Not even Full HD – 1,280 x 720 native resolution

**CONNECTIONS:** 2 x HDMI; component; phono AV; S-Video; PC VGA D-Sub

**BRIGHTNESS (CLAIMED):** 2,500 ANSI Lumens

**CONTRAST RATIO (CLAIMED):** 13,000:1

**DIMENSIONS:** 325(w) x 114(h) x 242(d)mm

**WEIGHT:** 2.6kg

**FEATURES:** Single-chip DLP; 10W audio system; USB; 4,000-6,500-hour lamp life; 30dB fan noise; Standard, Cinema, Dynamic picture presets; 2 x user presets; colour management, gamma adjustment and white balance calibration tools; available image size: 43-300in (diagonal); 1.31-1.57 throw ratio; 1.2:1 zoom ratio; 210W lamp

## HCC VERDICT

### BenQ W750

→ £500 Approx → [www.benq.co.uk](http://www.benq.co.uk)

**HIGHS:** Aggressive price tag; solid 720p performance; 3D-ready

**LOWS:** Unconvincing black level; limited motion resolution; not Full HD; 3D glasses are an optional extra

**Performance** ★★★★★

**Design** ★★★★★

**Features** ★★★★★

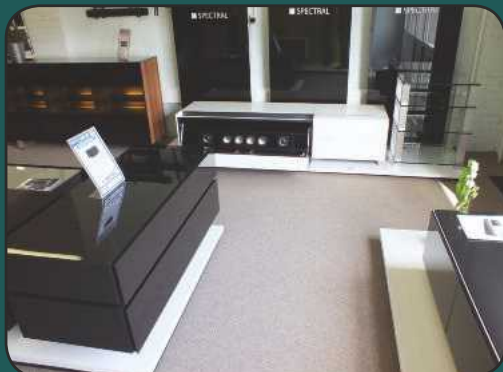
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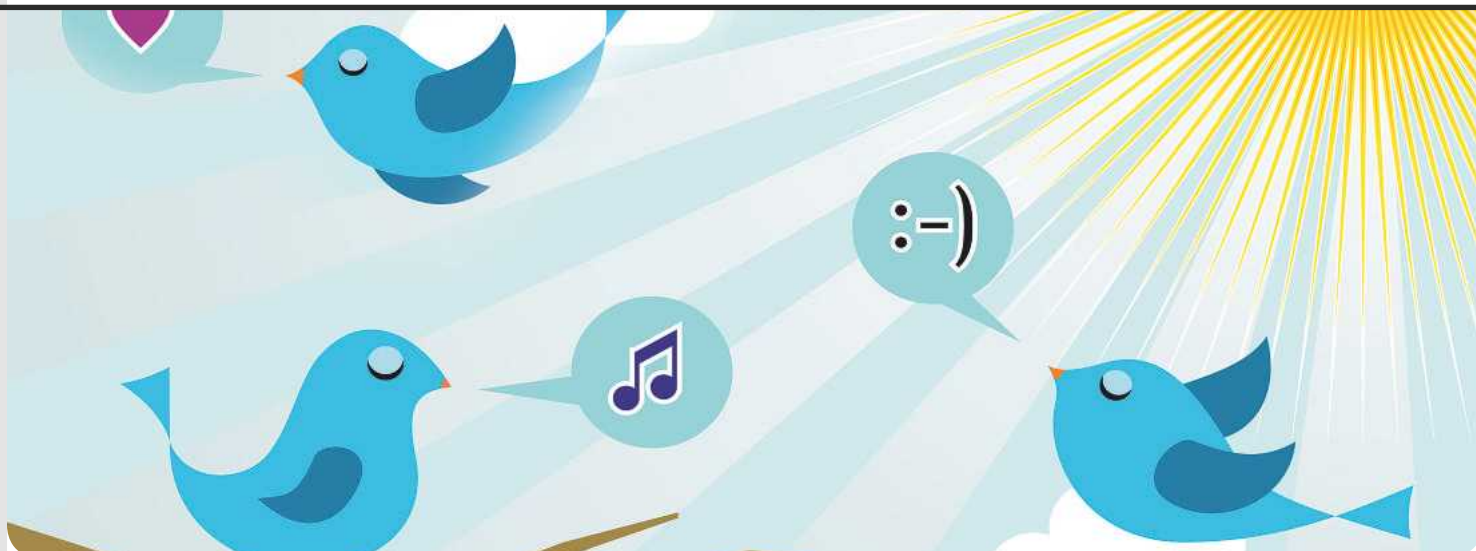
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# DIGITAL COPY

**Mark Craven** is already bored with scientific discussions about the picture benefits of 4K TVs, believing the best way to make a judgement is to see one for yourself

**I RECENTLY ENJOYED** a debate about the merits of 4K/Ultra HD TV with a total stranger. The debate was conducted through the medium of Twitter, and as this social media platform limits your missives to 140 characters at a time, it was probably the slowest, most sparsely-punctuated technology argument ever conducted. Such is life in the 21st century.

It began with me tweeting that I found it odd that some technology writers are extolling the virtues of 5in smartphones with Full HD screens, yet being dismissive of 58in TVs with Ultra HD resolutions. Nothing sinister there; just a casual observation. A little while after, however, I received replies from a fellow Twitter user telling me to 'do some research' and 'educate myself', pointing me in the direction of an article on the American tech website CNET, with the title 'Why 4K TVs are stupid'. I duly read through the article with zest, dying to discover why 4K TVs are indeed stupid.

A very well-written piece, with plenty of discussion about arcminutes, field of vision and viewing distances, it posited the idea that the physiology of the human eye makes it impossible to resolve the detail of a 4K image from 10 feet away unless it's on a screen 'well above 77in'. It also argued that the same eyeball can't reap the benefits of Full HD from eight feet unless the screen is 60in.

It was convincing stuff, except for the fact that my own experiences simply don't tally.

## How you view is up to you

Firstly, viewing distances are very much a personal preference. Go to any commercial cinema and you'll notice that there is more than one row of seats. Some people like to sit at the back, some in the middle, and some in the front. You sit where you

want, and no one can tell you that you're wrong to do so. Talk, therefore, of a 'living room' viewing distance is irrelevant.

Secondly, there are cinemas – such as IMAX – that have made a name for themselves with screens that are so big they practically fill your field of vision. People like it, so why not replicate that in the home? (Incidentally, when I'm playing on my PS3 or Xbox, I almost always end up cross-legged on the floor, nearer the screen than usual. Different content evokes different preferences).

Lastly, if 4K TVs are utterly pointless, then why is the consumer electronics industry bothering with them? Now if you're the sort of conspiracy theorist that believes all large corporations are inherently evil, you will counter that question with a sage wink, but, really, the implication that the entire AV world is pulling off a giant con at the expense of consumers, and risking countless yen, dollars and won manufacturing and shipping screens in the hope that no one will notice that they have zero benefit, is preposterous. **If 4K TVs are stupid, people won't want to buy them**, and Sony, Samsung, Panasonic *et al* will be left counting their losses (or more losses than usual).

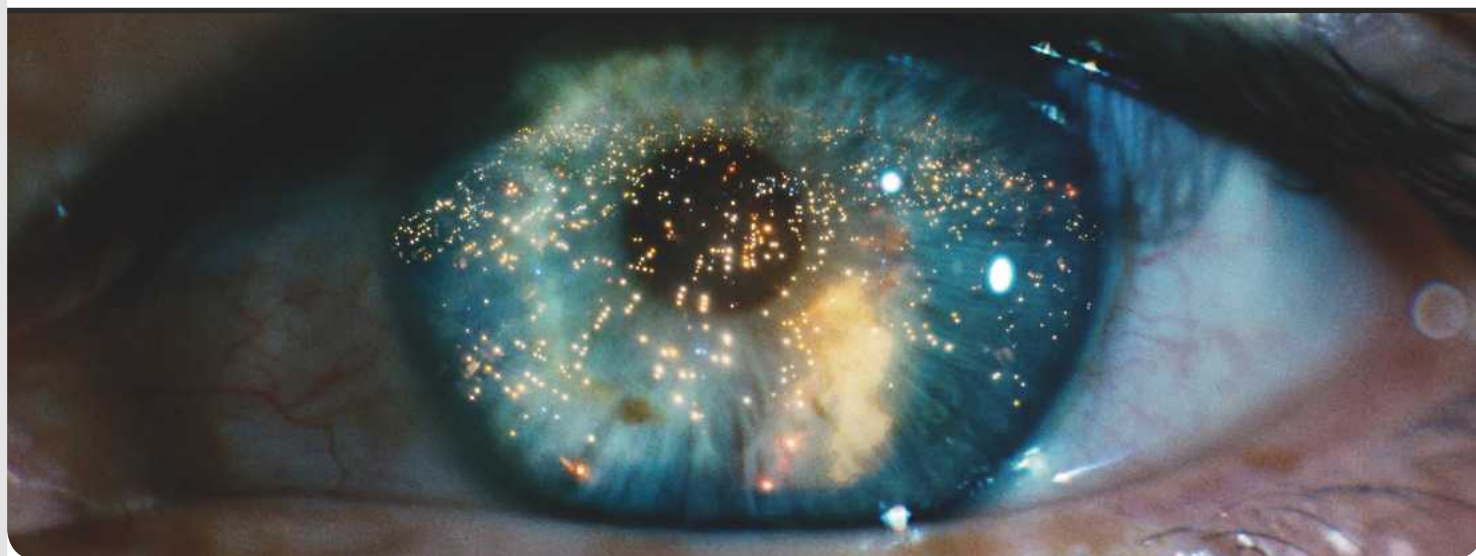
Sure, these companies will do their best to create a buzz and drive sales, but at the end of the day the proof will be in the pixel-packed pudding. Full HD sets have sold because consumers can see the improvement. 4K TVs are in the same boat.

You don't have to agree with me – this is merely an opinion. But nor should you believe the other side of the 4K argument. My advice: get a demo and see for yourself. If you don't perceive a benefit, leave the shop and buy a new subwoofer instead ■

*Will you be buying a 4K TV? And if so, at what size? Let us know: email [letters@homecinemachoice.com](mailto:letters@homecinemachoice.com)*

Not only does **Mark Craven** sit cross-legged when playing video games, he lights some incense and puts on Tibetan monk music. It helps his fragging.





# FILM FANATIC

An enthralling season of programming about film music across the BBC's TV and radio output leaves **Anton van Beek** singing the broadcaster's praises...

**THE SIGHT OF** one man lovingly fondling another man's baton isn't necessarily the sort of thing that I gravitate towards on TV. And yet it was one of the many joyous moments that made BBC Four's recent documentary series *Sounds of the Cinema: The Music that Made the Movies* so utterly compelling.

The man fondling the baton was affable author and composer Neil Brand, our guide through this three-part history of the evolution of the film score. The baton was one that had once belonged to the award-winning film composer Erich Wolfgang Korngold, who scored the music for the Errol Flynn classics *Captain Blood* (1935), *The Adventures of Robin Hood* (1938) and *The Sea Hawk* (1940).

The visit to the Warner Music Library that led to this meeting of man and baton was just one of the fascinating stops Brand made as he charted first the development of the orchestral score, then the way that composers and filmmakers embraced pop music, before finally exploring the way that changes in technology allowed composers to experiment and democratised the entire process. Along the way, the likes of **Lalo Schifrin, Hans Zimmer, Richard Sherman, Vangelis, Angelo Badalamenti and Clint Mansell** were on hand to reveal how they conjured up such memorable and affecting music.

It was, of course, must-see TV for any film fan, and best of all it didn't end there. The documentary was only one part of what the BBC had in store for cinephiles during September with its *Sound of the Cinema* season. Other highlights included a screening of the 2013 *Film Music Prom* on BBC Four, and a host of programming across the Beeb's radio network, including the launch of a new weekly film music show with Matthew Sweet on Radio 3.

Across its three episodes ...*The Music that Made the Movies* demonstrated the kind of serious approach to cinema that has been absent from our televisions since programmes like *Moving Pictures* were phased out in favour of magazine shows full of empty celebrity interviews.

## Missing notes

That's not to say that ...*The Music that Made the Movies* was perfect. Aside from the fact that it could easily have run for ten hours, Brand's series was unsurprisingly biased towards US cinema.

While plenty of time was spent establishing the foreign origins and musical education of pioneering early film composers like Korngold, Max Steiner and Franz Waxman, at no point did it ever explore how film scores develop in any other native film industries. Not even Bollywood musicals, where the score is so integral to a film's success.

And, speaking from personal bias, how can you do an episode that deals with the impact of the synthesizer on film composers and not talk about John Carpenter? While it's understandable that the work of pioneers in the field such as Wendy Carlos (*A Clockwork Orange*) and Vangelis (*Blade Runner*) merit attention, it seems odd not to make any reference to a filmmaker who not only made a name for himself by directing a plethora of classic genre films, but also composed the score for the vast majority of them as well.

But despite these flaws, ...*The Music that Made the Movies* was an absolute joy from start to finish. Let's hope the entire *Sound of the Cinema* season marks the start of a resurgence of interest in programming about our hobby at the BBC ■

*What's your favourite film score – and why?*  
Let us know: email [letters@homecinemachoice.com](mailto:letters@homecinemachoice.com)

**Anton van Beek** wrote this while listening to John Carpenter's score for *Halloween* on a loop... 'Anton what are you doing with that knife? No! Stop! Aaargh...'





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# Certified: AV-Holic!



HCC reader **Pat Joyce** used his building talents to create his very own cinema room



Pat admits he's been hooked on home cinema since watching *Top Gun* through a friend's AV setup

## Introduce yourself!

Hi, I'm Pat Joyce. I'm 48 years old and work as a carpenter/builder specialising in loft and garage conversions.

## How long have you been an AV-Holic?

My first experience with home cinema was at a friend's house; we watched *Top Gun* through his new Kenwood AV system – ever since then I have been hooked!

## Tell us about your garage conversion...

The work took nine days, working 12 hours each day. A couple of very good friends gave me a hand with the knock through, the plumbing and the laying of the carpet. But besides that I did all the work myself, including the wiring for the AV hardware.

## What's in your system at the moment?

My current setup uses KEF THX reference speakers with two 15in subwoofers. The visuals are handled by a JVC DLA-X30 projector. I've got a Panasonic DMP-BDT300 Blu-ray player, Xbox 360, a Myriad MDP 500 digital

preamplifier/processor, a Myriad MA240 power amplifier, a Myriad MA500 five-channel power amplifier, two additional KEF in-ceiling speakers, a Philips Pronto remote and a Sky+HD box.

## How much have you spent on the cinema?

I honestly haven't got a clue, as I've had two Seleco CRT projectors, two JVC projectors and numerous AV amplifiers and Blu-ray players over the years. I've always sold one to upgrade to the next one so it's hard to put a final cost on it.

## And what's next on your equipment list?

Maybe a new processor. I only recently bought a new acoustically-transparent projector screen (a 9ft model) via eBay. It now covers my speakers, and is different to the one in the photos here.

## What's your favourite bit of kit?

I would have to say the whole cinema room itself, as it has turned out better than I had hoped for!







### What do family and friends think of the system?

My family think it's fantastic; we always get together at least twice a week for movie nights. My friends also think it's great as they love coming round to watch the football!

Pat's room features six comfy-looking cinema recliners and colour-changing LEDs

### What's your favourite Blu-ray platter?

My current favourite would have to be *Iron Man 3*, as both the picture and sound quality is simply amazing.

### And what do you use to show of system to your friends?

I generally use *Battlefield*, *The Dark Knight Rises* or the aforementioned new *Iron Man* movie, as they all sound great and have a very good picture on my projection system.

### Finally: are you excited by 4K/Ultra HD?

I am, yes, but to be honest I haven't seen 4K yet on a projector so it's hard to judge it. I'm sure I'll find it awesome and will want one, even though I doubt my wife will find it quite so necessary... ■

### BE IN HCC!

**EMAIL US:** If you want to share your home cinema setup with other readers, email a selection of good-quality hi-res pictures – as large as possible and including one of yourself – to [letters@homecinemachoice.com](mailto:letters@homecinemachoice.com) with the subject heading 'AV-Holic'. We'll then be in touch with a few questions for you to answer.

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# Feedback

Got an axe to grind? Need to comment on current technology?  
Want to share your knowledge with our readers? **HCC** is here to help

## Wanted: a box of tricks

I wrote recently about advice on replacing my centre speaker with the proviso it had to be white (after buying my Gemini II sub in white, everything has to be white to match – looks stylish but made some decisions very limited!). I finally settled on a Dali Zensor Vokal as it blends well with my front and surround speakers. Now I'm after a new media player/streamer. I currently have an Iomega TV with Boxee (1TB drive internal and a 4TB external drive connected). While the picture quality is excellent and the user interface I find very intuitive, the lack of DTS-HD MA and Dolby TrueHD decoding is sorely missed. I have been looking at the Mede8er range (specifically



**Dune's HD Base 3D provides HD audio and video support and offers space for a 3.5in SATA drive**

the MED1000X3D) and wondered if you had any experience or knowledge about them? I am looking for a device as simple to use with an interface as logical and attractive as the Boxee (Kaleidescape on a budget visually) but with the aforementioned HD audio decoding. 3D BD-ISO playback would be a bonus but not essential. Do you have any

recommendations of your own to throw into the mix?  
*Andy Rogers, via email*

**Martin Pipe replies:** Yes, the Iomega TV – which we reviewed last year – is an intriguing little box(ee). But as you recognise, it's better suited to online video rather than the demands of enthusiast-level networked/USB video. You don't say what

Blu-ray player you have, or indeed whether you have one. Most recent models build in a pretty good DLNA-compatible networked multimedia client, USB playback and 3D support as well as support for hi-def audio, but stop short of offering the compatibility with Blu-ray ISO images that you require. Although a bit naughty, I can fully understand the practical

## ★ STAR LETTER...

### Curved TVs are a solution looking for a problem

I wonder if manufacturers are running out of ideas on how to design a truly better TV. Why else would they be hyping the benefits of curved screens? If so, I might suggest they look beyond their showroom and into my living room. For a start, why settle for weedy sound in a thin screen? I can't connect every TV to a surround sound system and I'd prefer not to settle for third-party soundbars. So why not move the audio out of the cabinet to a separate set of active speakers with dedicated wireless link? Not only is it going to sound better but it's easier to hide a power cable that is far from the TV than an interconnect coming out of the it. Second, why limit 4K/Ultra HD to upscaling existing HD content? They could improve my 3D (Passive) experience by simultaneously delivering full HD resolution to each eye. This could also improve quality by eliminating crosstalk and

validate the extra brightness inherent in the passive specs. Admittedly, I only watch 3D on a few movies but this feature would go a long way to justifying the cost of upgrading to 4K/UltraHD ahead of any new content.

Curved TVs seem like a solution looking for a problem but in my house I've got plenty of problems looking for solutions.  
*Ion Mitchell, via email*



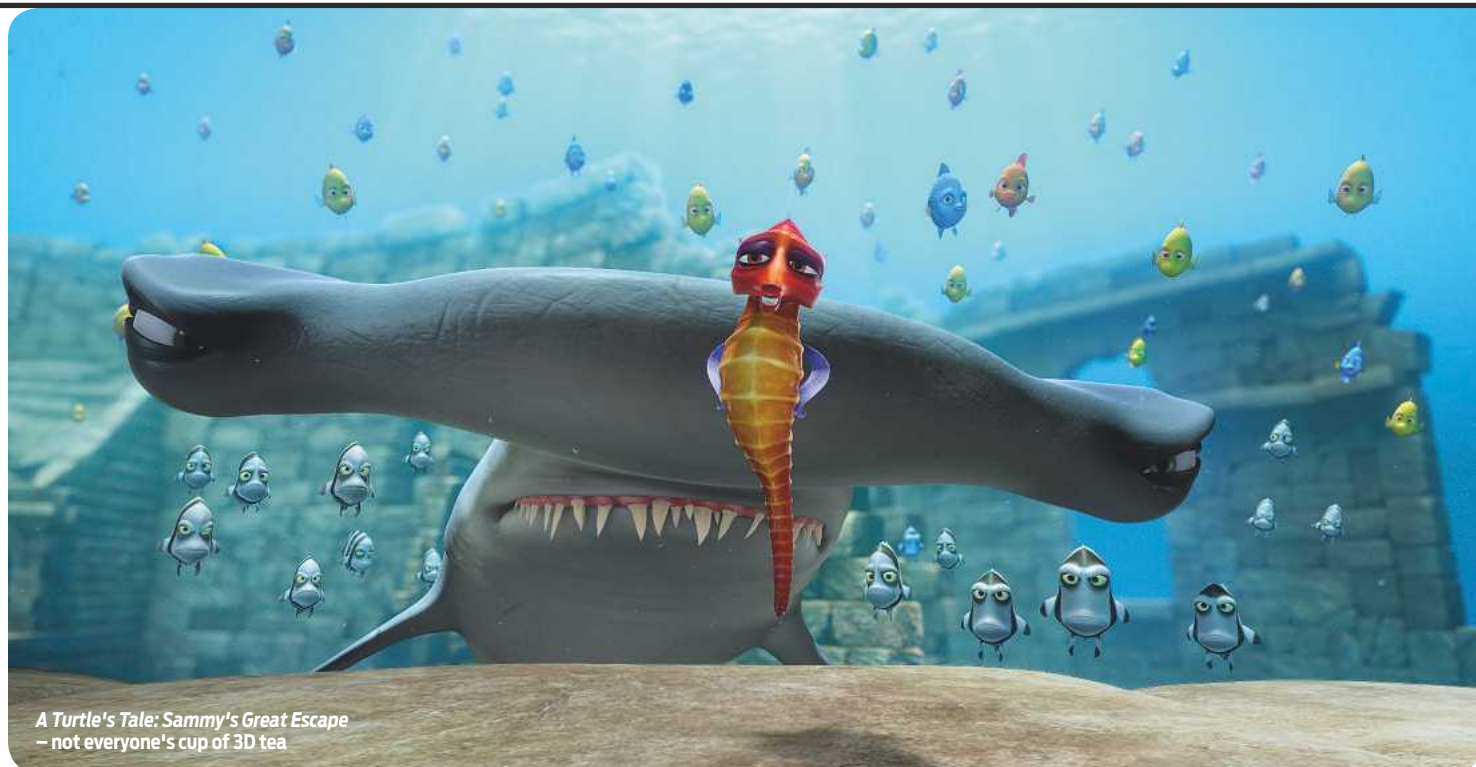
**Mark Craven replies:** First, Ion, a 4K Passive 3D display (such as those in Sony's range) does deliver Full HD 3D (more than that, in fact) to both eyes (albeit upscaled). The result is rather impressive: a better resolution than Active 3D with all the

benefits of Passive technology. It's one of the things we like the most about 4K, actually!

As for curved TVs, this something that seems to have touched a nerve with a lot of HCC readers. The logic behind them is a bit dubious (see our IFA report on p24) and we know that many of you would rather get a chance to own a flat OLED screen, and sample the picture benefits, before considering one that plays havoc with installation, meddles with off-axis viewing and requires you to sit close to it to get any impact from its wraparound design.

Star letter-writer Ion Mitchell wins a copy of *Halloween: 35th Anniversary* on Limited Edition Steelbook on Blu-ray courtesy of the generous people at Anchor Bay. This features a brand-new restoration, remixed audio and a commentary track from director John Carpenter and star Jamie Lee Curtis, as is available to own on from October 21. See p32 for our full review.





*A Turtle's Tale: Sammy's Great Escape*  
– not everyone's cup of 3D tea

benefits of 'ripping' your Blu-ray collection to networked or local hard drives in untouched ISO form. Movies are then only a few key presses away, and your discs can be stowed away safely until they're needed again.

We've not auditioned the MED1000X3D, but – although it may resemble a sandwich-toaster with its integrated HDD compartment open – it certainly seems to ticks all your boxes. Alternatives could include the more conventionally-styled A. C. Ryan PlayOn! HD3 (although you might have trouble finding one as the company no longer has a European presence) or the higher-end Dune HD Base 3D, which sports a full-width design. Both have a decent interface that could be called Kaleidescape on a budget if you accept that it's a limited budget.

### I'm done with 3D

While I read your updated list of the best 3D Blu-rays (HCC #226),

I'm certain I won't be rushing out to buy any of them. Why, you ask? Because I've pretty much given up on 3D.

As another reader wrote, the BBC has stopped making 3D content, as have other channels around the world. Sales of 3D cinema tickets are falling every week. Many films are still being converted from 2D to 3D just to be able to charge extra.

On top of all that, I've found the experience of watching 3D on my plasma TV frustrating. The Active glasses are comfortable but still distracting for someone not used to wearing spex, and the flickering effect if there's any other light in the room is annoying. And I have to remember to charge them.

I've seen some great 3D movies (*Avatar* and *Tron: Legacy* spring to mind) but these days I'm much more likely to stick to the 2D version, as it offers a more relaxed viewing experience and better picture quality.

Jonathan Gummerson, via email

Mark Craven replies: It certainly seems as if 3D is having a bad time, as Summer 2013 witnessed record lows for stereoscopic ticket sales. I'm interested to see whether *Avatar 2* (whenever that arrives) can reinvigorate the industry.

However, as Sky tells us this issue (p10), its 3D channel is

adding viewers, rather than losing them, so don't write off the format just yet, even if the BBC is getting cold feet.

### Sssshhhhhh!

Patrick in the last issue [*he's back in this issue, too!* - Ed] reveals he has very understanding neighbours. I'm lucky enough to have a detached house quite a distance from my neighbours but still have a problem. The sound from my cinema room (which is on the top floor) travels quite a lot around the house.

Because of this I'm interested in soundproofing the room to some extent, but don't know where to start. Any ideas?

Alan, via email

Mark Craven replies: Where to start indeed? Soundproofing is an often overlooked part of any cinema setup but can be really important if you're sharing a property with people who don't want to hear the sound of rattling machine-gun fire and screaming TIE fighters, 24/7. Consequently, you end up listening at reduced volume levels when you know your system can do better.

There is no quick fix to sound travelling beyond your room – you can't just throw a few heavy fabrics around. To achieve a truly impressive result you will need to look at revamping the

construction of your room, such as replacing basic doors with heavy-duty acoustic options, and creating a floating floor with minimal contact to the one below. Another option is Green Glue, a rather clever compound that transfers the energy of soundwaves to heat. However, this needs to be sandwiched between two rigid layers, so you have to add the cost of, say, plasterboard to the equation (Green Glue itself isn't too expensive – you can get 12 tubes for a little over £100, which the company says will cover 17m sq).

Essentially, effective soundproofing can be achieved >

Green glue can help you get out of sticky sound-leakage scenarios



### CONTACT US...

Write to HCC, AV Tech Media Ltd, Hadlow House, 9 High Street, Green Street Green, Orpington, BR6 6BG, or email us at [letters@homecinemachoice.com](mailto:letters@homecinemachoice.com)

Please note: we cannot guarantee to print/answer all the letters we receive. Sorry.

but will take time and money. With that in mind, you might want to get a professional outfit involved so it's done properly.

### 21:9 TVs break the rules

When reading the *HCC* #225 'Hi-def hiccups' article, and especially the part about releasing a movie in an altered aspect ratio, I remembered something from a reader's cinema article in an older issue.

In *HCC* #221 Matt Bridger is talking about his cinema setup with a Philips 21:9 3D TV. He says that for him it is an irritation when a studio decides to crop a movie from its original aspect ratio of 2.40:1 to 16:9 for a disc release. He says that it should be left as the director intended. But later he talks about the clever picture settings of his Philips TV which convert 16:9 images to fit the 21:9 screen. Strange that in this direction the intention of the director is not important; it seems that he just wants all the movies that he's watching completely

Philips' 21:9 TVs rescale content to fit the unique aspect ratio

filling the 21:9 screen. I'm with him concerning the aspect ratio intended by the director; that is the one we should be able to view at home. But for me personally that means that 1.33, 1.37, 1.77, 1.85, 2.35, 2.39 and all the other possibilities will be viewed in that aspect ratio, even when that is with black bars horizontally or vertically! And when the aspect ratio changes during the movie (like *Tron: Legacy*, *The Dark Knight* and *The Dark Knight Rises*) that is also what I would like to see at home.

But when someone chooses to stretch an image to fit his screen (in 'the old days' people stretching 4:3 images on their 'brand-new' 16:9 televisions, and now some people stretching 16:9 to 21:9), I think that is worse than cutting a movie from 2.40:1 to 1.78:1 because the properties of the image are not changed, only the content.

Patrick, Belgium

Anton van Beek replies: I agree completely with your point about stretching an image to fit

a screen format. That's a no-no as far as I'm concerned, and one reason why I was dubious about the Philips 21:9 (the other being the price tag).

But 'cutting' a movie from, as you say, 2.40:1 to 1.78:1 is equally bad, as you're losing picture information, as well as the intended geometry. Film directors don't just point a camera and shoot – they frame an image in a specific way for a specific reason. Whatever is shown at cinemas should be shown at home! ■

## Win! Three great Blu-rays up for grabs

Just email your answer to [Competitions@homecinemachoice.com](mailto:Competitions@homecinemachoice.com) to be in with a chance



### Behind the Candelabra

This entertaining true story of Liberace is the perfect film for anyone looking to add a little razzle-dazzle to their home cinema. *Behind the Candelabra* is available

to buy now on Blu-ray and DVD, and thanks to EntertainmentOne, we have five copies of the film on Blu-ray to give away!

#### Question:

Liberace is best-known for playing which of the following musical instruments?

#### Answer:

A) Piano B) Trombone C) Harmonica

Email your answer with '*Candelabra*' as the subject heading – and include your postal address!



### Creepshow

The classic 1982 horror anthology *Creepshow* makes its long-awaited Blu-ray debut on October 28 courtesy of Second Sight Films. This feature-packed hi-def platter is

sure to delight horror fans and we have five copies of the Blu-ray up for grabs.

#### Question:

Which famous horror novelist stars in one of *Creepshow*'s tales of terror?

#### Answer:

A) Clive Barker B) Bram Stoker  
C) Stephen King

Email your answer with '*Creepshow*' as the subject heading – and include your postal address!



### The Mummy

Hammer's 1959 version of *The Mummy* is back to terrify a new generation of fans thanks to Lions Gate Home Entertainment's Blu-ray release. Simply answer the following

question correctly to stand a chance of winning one of five Blu-ray copies...

#### Question:

Who plays the titular monster in Hammer's *The Mummy*?

#### Answer:

A) Christopher Lee B) Vincent Price  
C) Peter Cushing

Email your answer with '*Mummy*' as the subject heading – and include your postal address!

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# GET A HELPING HAND WITH CALIBRATION

Fed up with out-of-the-box presets, **Martin Pipe** fine-tunes his audio-visual entertainment with the aid of Spears & Munsil's new Blu-ray calibration platter



Spears & Munsil's new set features BD and DVD test discs, guide booklet and colour filters

**A FEW YEARS** ago, many purchasers of the Oppo BDP-93 and BDP-95 Blu-ray players got a little extra thrown in. This was the original version of *Spears & Munsil HD Benchmark*, a calibration Blu-ray designed to help you get the best out of your AV system. Now a second edition has been released, called, unsurprisingly, *Spears & Munsil HD Benchmark 2nd Edition*. Although Oppo doesn't now bundle this disc with its players, you can pick it up in the UK for £30. Having spent quality time with it, I can confirm it's a worthwhile purchase, because if you want the best pictures your equipment is capable of, some level of calibration is vital.

Why? Because out of the box, flatscreen TVs don't offer ideal results. Pictures on many presets can be excessively bright, with colour and contrast levels best described as aggressive. Even the Cinema or Natural settings can be off-kilter. The good news is that even entry-level screens typically offer menu-driven picture adjustments nowadays, and calibration helps you set them properly.

Then there are the upmarket sets with dedicated adjustment menus for professional ISF (Imaging Science Foundation) tweaking. An ISF-certified calibrator will extract every last ounce of

performance from your equipment, but this is a specialist activity and not exactly cheap.

Those who have blown their budgets on their Blu-ray collection – and are happy to fiddle themselves – are the target market for calibration discs. They can get surprisingly close to what professionals can achieve with colorimeters and other tech hardware, and in using one you'll learn more about what's involved. (It's interesting to note that when I attended an ISF Level 2 course a few years ago, the original Spears & Munsil disc featured quite heavily).

## A potted history of tweaking

Calibration discs for home cinema have been around for nearly 20 years – one of the first was the *Video Essentials* Laserdisc. A version of this, *Digital Video Essentials*, was subsequently released on DVD, D-VHS and Blu-ray. Silicon Optix also released its *HQV* platter on HD DVD and Blu-ray in 2007. There are also basic calibration tools built into some DVDs and Blu-rays – most notably the THX Optimizer – which cover the barest essentials of picture adjustment, such as brightness, contrast, colour/tint and aspect ratio. If you have a poorly adjusted display, the transformation yielded by even a simple bundled tool like this can be amazing, but a dedicated disc can take you further in your goal of making the most of your hardware.

They're not the sort of thing you'd want to watch regularly, but it's worth using them every few months so that you can check your system and make any necessary tweaks; the performance of displays (projectors in particular) tends to alter over time.



The initial Video Calibration section covers contrast, brightness, sharpness, colour and tint



On any calibration disc, you'll find a number of test patterns designed specifically for optimising the settings of various controls on your display, sometimes with the aid of cards or glasses fitted with filters (Spears & Munsil's Blu-ray is supplied with these for colour saturation and hue adjustment). There will also be a series of test clips (typically filmed in exotic locations) of the highest possible quality. Play these before and after calibration, so you can see for yourself the difference that adjustments have made. After going through the step-by-step process, your favourite movies should look noticeably clearer, more natural and endowed with lifelike vibrancy; under some circumstances, it may seem as if you're using a new display.

### Bonus features

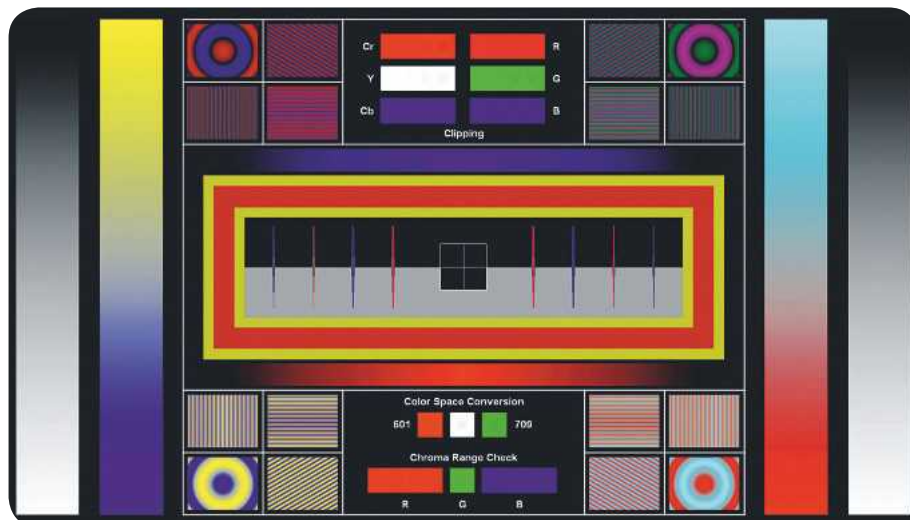
This second edition Blu-ray has been enhanced with additional features and many more test patterns. It now covers 3D displays, caters for audio and allows you to assess the motion performance of high-end LCD screens with 120Hz and 240Hz refresh rates. Even if you have the original, it might well be worth buying the new version.

In the box are two discs. One is the calibration Blu-ray; the second is a bonus DVD for use with older systems – in addition to more basic tests and display patterns, this offers features designed to assess the deinterlacing performance of your DVD player.

As with the Blu-ray, the DVD's disc menus are attractively designed and the content sensibly organised into sections; despite their sophistication, usage of both is straightforward. However, although region-free, the DVD is NTSC and therefore of limited interest to UK viewers. Deinterlacing of film-derived material is a lot more critical with NTSC than it is with our PAL system, owing to the 2:3 pulldown telecine tricks that Americans needed to convert the 24 frames-per-second of film to NTSC's 60Hz interlaced video. All we had to do here in PAL-land was speed up the film ever so slightly...

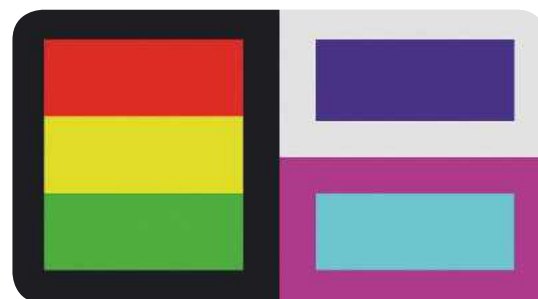
Such issues don't really affect the world of Blu-ray, as film-derived material is stored on the disc at 24p. Newer HD video, including the menus and most of the test material of the S&M Blu-ray, is also recorded at 24p. All modern players have a 24p HDMI output mode, and all modern hi-def displays will be able to accept that. If the 24p mode isn't set, then the Blu-ray player has to convert the film-based video into another standard like 1080p60 – ironically, the default mode of some Oppo players – and that could introduce nasties like motion judder.

This is an interesting point. The guide booklet that accompanies the S&M disc sensibly recommends that, prior to calibration, you turn off tweaks like 'noise reduction', 'shadow detail' and 'Motion Plus' in the menus, select an appropriate picture mode ('Cinema' or 'Custom', rather than 'Vivid' or 'Game') on your TV and choose an initial 'colour space' in the player's setup menu. However, it doesn't from the outset introduce more fundamental issues – like the best way to connect your source or check the output settings of your player. 24p is



Above: Spears & Munsil's eye-catching colour space pattern helps you hunt for banding errors

The Colour/Tint test is used in conjunction with a screen's blue-only mode (or the supplied filter) to ensure accurate luma and chroma levels



mentioned later on in the booklet, in an overview of the disc's sections, but I'd argue that it's important to get this right from the beginning.

Furthermore, although the booklet – aimed at beginners – is on the whole interesting and contains many nuggets of valuable advice, it does tend to dwell on terms like 4:2:2 colour space without explaining what they are. And little space has been devoted to the disc's 3D tests.

The booklet is, however, only one side of the story. Each test on the Blu-ray is given a brief guide onscreen. Then there's S&M's website ([www.spearsandmunsil.com](http://www.spearsandmunsil.com)), which is a treasure trove of information. There, the company can go into more detail – the articles on contrast and brightness adjustment are well worth reading. There's also a thorough explanation of colour space, but those 3D tests have still so far been overlooked.

Once calibration is finished, grab a favourite Blu-ray to see if your display is now offering a superheroic performance

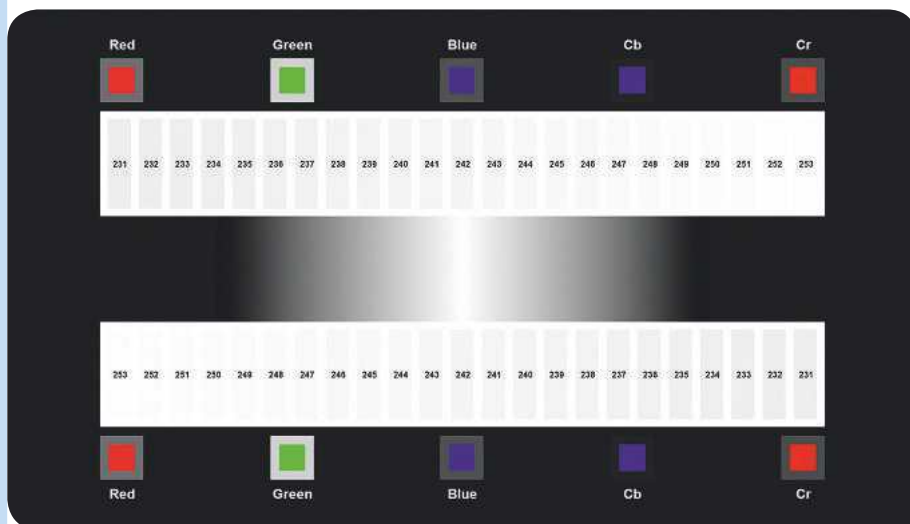


### Getting started

The first section on the S&M platter is the all-important Video Calibration. This is described in sequence in the booklet (and via an onscreen guide). Dedicated test patterns, sporting neat, original designs despite being based on industry standards like plugues and greyscale bars, take you through the key settings. These are contrast (video level), brightness (black level), colour/tint, sharpness and colour temperature.

Ideally, the colour tests require you to engage your TV's blue-only mode.

Of course, not all sets have one; the 2D Samsung 40in LED set I regularly use does, but a Samsung 3D plasma that was in for review >



The Blu-ray offers a section to achieving your screen's optimum contrast performance

doesn't. If your display lacks such a facility, you'll need the blue filter supplied with the disc.

A final colour space evaluation pattern, which is rather busy, helps you verify that a full range of colour tones and shades are being reproduced correctly with no banding or misregistration; if there are any problems, the output mode of the disc player and any hidden display features should be examined and, after making any changes, the tests repeated.

Considering that no special measuring or test equipment is involved – you're relying on your eyes, essentially – it's amazing how good a job this disc does. Using the montage test clip featured on the Blu-ray (some breathtaking scenery, in 2D or 3D), the picture I eventually arrived at was far more balanced than it was out of the box. Colours were truer-to-life, greyscales more natural and finer details no longer exaggerated. The improvements were, of course, also evident with off-air HDTV and Blu-ray movies.

From the Advanced Video section, you can choose from an enormous range of other test patterns (including standard-def ones). Among them are patterns for detecting nasties like chroma-upsampling errors (which the S&M team 'discovered' over a decade ago), identifying scaling/cropping problems, evaluating contrast ratio, and assessing the effects of motion on resolution. Associated with this is a Video Measurements section that will appeal to those with light meters and other measuring tools.

The Video Processing section contains a comprehensive range of torture tests designed to identify problems with scalars – whether built into a disc player or TV, or in an external processor. But that's not all. A trio of sections entitled Equal Energy

is also available. The first of these is a cleverly designed series of patterns that will enable you to get an approximate value for the gamma (which expresses how much light is output for a given video signal level) of your display without professional gear. It involves making comparisons between patterns, and then reading off the gamma value when a visual match is obtained (a gamma of between 2.3 and 2.4 is recommended for home cinemas in dark rooms). Interestingly, Samsung's 3D plasma achieved this out of the box with no need for menu-setting changes. The other two sections are designed to assess gamma/greyscale and colour gamut (range) with the use of specialist test equipment like colorimeters. These have been designed with the pros in mind.

Finally, in video terms, S&M provides a Stereoscopic area – before using this, you need to switch the disc to 3D mode in its setup menu. Most of the aforementioned patterns on this disc are encoded in flat 3D, so they'll appear onscreen correctly when your glasses are on and the disc/equipment is set to 3D. Contrast, brightness and so on do, after all, need to be set for 3D as well as 2D – and the darkening properties of 3D spex mean that calibration will be different for each (most displays have a different picture setting for 3D mode). True 3D content on the disc is designed to help you check the polarity and synchronisation of your glasses and assess depth. Visual crosstalk can be determined, and with your display's 3D adjustments (if there are any...) you should be able to minimise this. Using these menus, I found that the Samsung TV's 3D defaults benefitted from a moderate downwards tweak of the '3D perspective' setting.

So *Spears & Munsil HD Benchmark 2nd Edition* is a comprehensive and well-considered collection for eking the best from your home cinema display. The audio tests, in comparison, are rather basic – although the essentials are there. They cover channel identification, speaker-phasing checks, level setting (Spears & Munsil suggests you might want an SPL meter here) and determining whether the video and sound are out of sync (and if so, by how much). 5.1 is the default configuration, but a 7.1 mode can be specified in the disc's setup menu.

### A bargain buy

Considering what's on offer here, the £30 asking price is something of a bargain. All readers of this magazine are by definition home cinema enthusiasts, and probably won't be disappointed if they invest in a copy. *Spears & Munsil HD Benchmark 2nd Edition* allows you to do a pretty good calibration job without additional test gear, and you could even earn yourself plenty of brownie points by setting up the TVs of your friends and demonstrating how a little fine-tuning can make a big difference. Effort and patience is required to get the best out of it – and you may feel you've been swamped by an information overload at times – but the results are undoubtedly worth it ■

*Spears & Munsil HD Benchmark 2nd Edition*, £30 approx, supplier: [www.oppo-bluray.co.uk](http://www.oppo-bluray.co.uk)



The Stereoscopic section can help you get to grips with your TV's adjustment options



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# PLAYBACK

→ **SOFTWARE HIGHLIGHTS** **AFTER EARTH** It's the end of the world as we know it! **FAST & FURIOUS 6** Get your motor running as the fast-car franchise hits Europe **THE GREAT GATSBY 3D** Baz Luhrmann adds some razzle-dazzle to the world of 3D Blu-ray **THE LITTLE MERMAID** We sing the praises of Disney's new restoration **LIFEFORCE** Sexy space vampires sizzle in hi-def **AND MUCH MORE!**

## Dead and loving it

The Walking Dead: The Complete Third Season → EntertainmentOne → Region B BD

The third season of AMC's hit zombie TV series was the best yet, and is now released on a must-own BD boxset. Turn to p103 to satisfy your taste for flesh



### HCC RATINGS KEY...

Outstanding	★★★★★
Above average	★★★★☆
Acceptable	★★★☆☆
Disappointing	★★★☆☆
Dire	★★★☆☆



Being the worst actor in this film is a walk in the park for Jaden Smith



# Alas Smith and Shyamalan

Fading filmmaker's career decline continues with this misguided father-and-son vanity project

## → AFTER EARTH

In the distant future an environmental cataclysm has forced humanity to abandon Earth and set up a new home on the planet Nova Prime. But when their spaceship crash-lands on Earth, teenage military cadet Kitai (Jaden Smith) must venture out into the inhospitable world and overcome his fears if he's to save the life of his injured father (Will Smith).

Anyone hoping the sci-fi genre would give director M. Night Shyamalan the opportunity to recapture the brilliance of his earlier flicks *The Sixth Sense* and *Unbreakable* be warned: this is Shyamalan on the same form that bought us *The Happening* and *The Lady in the Water*, with its sentimental script, unconvincing dialogue and languid pacing. A rip-roaring space adventure, it ain't.

Another major failing of *After Earth* is its central casting. While Will Smith is one of the most charismatic actors around (but unfortunately spends much of this movie lying on his back), his son Jaden currently has about as much charisma as a lump of space rock – a problem when you have to carry, almost single-handedly, a \$130million blockbuster. Maybe that's what's behind the downcast expression he wears on his face in every single scene.

**Picture:** *After Earth* is the first film that studio Sony Pictures shot in 4K. This no doubt means that whenever a home entertainment 4K delivery system is introduced, you can look forward to seeing it all over again in its native format. That's for the future,



### HCC VERDICT

#### After Earth

→ Sony Pictures → All-region BD  
→ £25 Approx

**WE SAY:** It may look superb, but this is the sci-fi equivalent of Will Smith's father-son rap song *Just the Two of Us*

Movie ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Picture ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Audio ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Extras ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Overall ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

though. All you need to know now is that the film's AVC 2.40:1 1080p encode is certainly sensational.

Colour reproduction is reference-grade, finding exquisite tones in Earth's verdant locations, and the detail on show is frequently mesmerising. An impressive contrast range ensures Shyamalan's visuals have real pop, too. Exactly how much of this is down to the 4K source material and how much is due to the talents of Sony Pictures' Blu-ray production team is pretty much irrelevant – simply sit back and savour the spectacular end result.

**Audio:** *After Earth*'s DTS-HD MA 5.1 soundtrack doesn't live up to the disc's impeccable picture. From a purely technical standpoint it features some very natural movement around the soundstage (check out either Chapter 3's asteroid storm or Chapter 9's sky jump), aided by an excellent dynamic range.

The disappointment is that much of mix is so unadventurous. You'd expect the jungle-setting to mean that the soundfield would be constantly alive with the sound of local wildlife, but that's not the case at all. For chunks of the film's running time it's a modest affair, more concerned with James Newton Howard's original score and Garry Whitta's dialogue than the atmospheric effects needed to breathe life into its narrative.

**Extras:** Sony Pictures' single-disc release includes five brief behind-the-scenes featurettes, an illustrated alternate opening and a five-minute montage of *Nature of the Future* wildlife footage, that can also be set to run as a screensaver. Not much to get excited about, in other words.



## The Returned: Series One

Universal Pictures → R2 DVD  
£28 Approx



Like the legion of fans who followed it on Channel 4 earlier this year, we found this French slow-burn saga of the dead returning from their graves in an isolated Alpine village to be absolutely *magnifique* and fully deserving of a five-star rating. Sadly, Universal's treatment of it here is anything but. As if the lack of a HD release wasn't bad enough for a series this hauntingly beautiful, the anamorphic 1.78:1 DVD transfers really struggle with the show's subdued palette and exhibit some worrying amounts of aliasing. As for extras, there aren't any. *Zut alors!*



## Sharknado

StudioCanal → Region B BD  
£20 Approx



Just because a film is intentionally camp and ridiculous doesn't stop it from being bad. Take this cheesy B-movie about a freak tornado that scoops up hundreds of man-eating sharks and starts dropping them on L.A. Is it funny? Yes, but only for 15 minutes or so. After that it's just repetitive rubbish that has nothing else up its sleeve beyond the titular 'sharknado'. The Blu-ray is none-too-impressive either, due to its inconsistent 1080p imagery (visual effects shots look like they've been badly upscaled from SD) and a DTS-HD MA 5.1 track that sometimes buries the dialogue among the rest of the mix.



## Snitch

EntertainmentOne → Region B BD  
£20 Approx



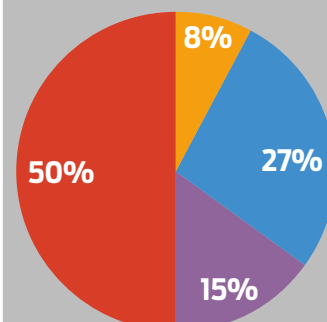
Part muddled criticism of the US government's federal drug policy, part throwback to '70s crime dramas, *Snitch* is an odd movie. Our main issue is that it's quite hard to accept Dwayne Johnson as a regular Joe who can get beaten up by street dealers. If this was any of his other films he'd simply sort it out by laying 'the smack' down. But *Snitch* is intended to be a serious drama, so that doesn't happen. The Blu-ray itself impresses with strong AVC 2.40:1 1080p visuals and DTS-HD MA 7.1 sonics. Extras include a three-part *Making of...* documentary and a commentary by the director.



## WE ASKED...

Which is the best of these legendary horror franchises?

■ Texas Chainsaw Massacre  
■ Halloween ■ Friday the 13th  
■ Nightmare on Elm Street



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# Not quite The Expendables 3...

Britain's leading action star dabbles in something a little more serious

## → HUMMINGBIRD

Jason Statham flexes his acting muscles (as well as his actual muscles) in this London-set drama from writer/director Steven Knight (*Eastern Promises*). Statham plays Crazy Joey, an ex-soldier turned homeless alcoholic, given the chance to get his life in order after a fortuitous tumble through a skylight into an empty apartment. Soon flush with cash (courtesy of some freelance work for local Chinese gangsters), he sets about helping the nun who runs the local soup kitchen and tracking down the man responsible for the death of a friend.

*Hummingbird* is an intriguing movie, mixing romance and themes of morality with flashes of violence and wry humour, aided by solid performances by its cast. Regular Statham watchers may find it a little sombre, though, and will want to skip straight to the bit where he threatens to kill someone with a spoon.

**Picture:** Films set in the UK's capital often get so bogged down in showcasing its urban grime that the experience is rather deflating. Not so *Hummingbird*, where cinematographer Chris Menges finds beauty amongst the Soho locations, throwing neon lighting around with abandon. And Lionsgate's disc, for the most part, serves up these visuals well, with plenty of colour punch, sharpness and detail-packed shadows in the 2.40:1 AVC Full HD encode.

However, your enjoyment is blighted by a curious mishap – the opening sequences (from the film's first shot until about six minutes in when the overlaid credits stop) are considerably washed out, with murky greys where inky blacks should be and a



totally hollow feel as a result. It's so obvious that it'll make you think something's awry with your display, until the contrast suddenly pings. A real shame.

**Audio:** The DTS-HD MA 5.1 mix is at least untainted. It's used well to draw you into Crazy Joey's tumultuous lifestyle, with the surround channels adding background ambience to the locations and gunfire to his military flashbacks. Nor is Dario Marianelli's soft score trapped in the front soundstage. Dialogue is clear, too.

**Extras:** Anyone hoping to get some real insight into how Jason Statham ended up in a 'serious' movie where his character woos a nun will be disappointed by this BD release: the only extra is a five-minute *Making of...* featurette that barely touches the surface of *Hummingbird*'s production. This is unfortunate, as the brief moments with Steven Knight show that he's an eloquent filmmaker, and we'd love to hear more of what he has to say.



## HCC VERDICT

### Hummingbird

→ Lionsgate → Region B BD  
→ £20 Approx

**WE SAY:** Statham impresses in a dramatic role, but this Blu-ray has some issues

Movie ★★★★★

Picture ★★★★★

Audio ★★★★★

Extras ★★★★★

Overall ★★★★★

Incredibly, this isn't the most ridiculous thing you'll see in *Fast & Furious 6*



DISC  
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# Gentlemen, start your engines!

Director Justin Lin and actor Vin Diesel return with the Bugatti Veyron of Hollywood blockbusters



## → FAST & FURIOUS 6

Dom (Vin Diesel), Brian (Paul Walker) and the rest of the *F&F* gang are brought back out of 'retirement' when Agent Hobbs (Dwayne Johnson) asks for their assistance in taking down a criminal mastermind with his own team of ace drivers. The kicker? One of those drivers appears to be Dom's believed-dead former lover Letty (Michelle Rodriguez).

Director Justin Lin faced what appeared to be an insurmountable challenge with *Furious Six* (as it is called on screen). Not only did he have to top his breathtakingly brilliant *Fast Five*, but he also needed to finally tie-up all of the chronological issues that had built up around the films.

That he not only achieves his goals, but does so with as much verve and style as *Furious Six* has to show, is a credit to his skills as a director. And while it's gutting to see him go after taking the franchise to such insane heights – part seven is being overseen by James Wan (*Saw*, *Insidious*) – he does it in fine style

and leaves us with the most tantalising post-credits cliffhanger imaginable...

**Picture:** Like its predecessor, *Furious Six* was shot on Kodak 35mm film using Arriflex cameras, so it's no surprise to discover that it retains a very similar look and feel on Blu-ray.

Presented in its original 2.40:1 aspect ratio courtesy of an AVC 1080p encode, this is near-enough reference quality stuff. Colour reproduction is particularly impressive, filling the screen with hot, vibrant hues. This slightly amplified nature of the palette does result in a few orange skin tones, but this is pretty much par for the course with modern Hollywood blockbusters, and is counterbalanced by the astonishingly vivid primaries in evidence whenever the brightly-painted automobiles take centre stage.

Supporting this are strong blacks that reveal reams of shadow detail as well as very impressive detailing in close-ups and wide shots. Together with the rich colour palette, they give the hi-def imagery a



Guns, explosions... yep, it's another *Fast & Furious* movie



Debauched street parties, souped-up cars... yep, it's still another *Fast & Furious* movie





## DEMO SCREEN...

## Fast &amp; Furious 6: Extended Action Packed Edition

Time code: 085.41 – 094.53



**Tanks for the memories:** Faced with the difficulty of doing something new with a car chase, director Justin Lin decides to give the bad guys a tank, just to make things even more explosive!



**Road rage:** Naturally, it isn't long before Dom and his crew are having to dodge explosions that send cars flying up in the air and sound effects flying around your speaker setup.



**A bridge too far:** The precision of the DTS-HD MA 5.1 mix's positional effects, and weight of the LFE channel, ensures you'll be ducking your head as Dom races under a collapsing bridge.



**Leap of faith:** Just when you think things can't get any madder, the sequence pays off with the tank getting flipped and Dom and Letty (or their unconvincing CGI doubles) flying through the air.



The gang could never agree on which takeaway to order



Diesel may soon add another franchise to his CV following meetings with Marvel



genuine sense of depth and space that helps sell the fast-paced driving scenes.

**Audio:** Brum-brum, neeeyoun, screech, ka-boom! *Furious Six* roars through the streets of London with a terrifically powerful and unceasingly dynamic DTS-HD Master Audio 5.1 soundtrack. From the expected car sounds to gunfire, explosions and plane crashes, the mix makes exemplary use of the entire soundstage.

Each of the cars on show is given its own audio signature in the mix, enabling you to track their movement in a three-dimensional space via sound placement alone. And while subtlety doesn't really get much of a look in, the 5.1 soundtrack also proves particularly adept at highlighting the macho

dialogue, keeping it front and centre at all times. Our only complaint? We want 7.1!

**Extras:** As its title hints at, this 'Extended Action Packed Edition' Blu-ray sports a brand-new cut of the movie alongside the theatrical release version. However, before you get too excited, it's worth noting that the re-edit only runs 56 seconds longer than the original cut, and mainly consists of alternate versions of existing material and some minor scene extensions (the most obvious being Michelle Rodriguez's scrap with Gina Carano).

The longer cut also features an exclusive commentary by director Justin Lin, which is as open and interesting as we've come to expect.

The 19-minute *Take Control* featurette seems like it was originally produced for a picture-in-picture track, but instead fast-forwards through the film, stopping every now and again for Vin Diesel, Paul Walker, Justin Lin and Michelle Rodriguez to cut into the action and discuss the making of the movie. The four-part *The Making of Fast & Furious 6* provides a good overview of the production, while eight further behind-the-scenes featurettes shine the spotlight on shooting the action scenes, the film's cars and the fight choreography. Finally, there's a reel of three short and inconsequential deleted scenes.



## HCC VERDICT

## Fast &amp; Furious 6: Extended Action Packed Edition

→ Universal Pictures

→ All-region BD → £25 Approx

**WE SAY:** Pure blockbuster escapism of the best kind on a killer Blu-ray platter

Movie ★★★★★

Picture ★★★★★

Audio ★★★★★

Extras ★★★★★

Overall ★★★★★

## ARCADE ACTION

Bigscreen home entertainment isn't just about movies anymore. Check out these two videogames vying for time on your home cinema system...

### Grand Theft Auto V

Rockstar → Xbox 360/PS3 → £50 Approx



Okay, so Rockstar's latest isn't exactly enlightened in its depiction of women. And, yes, it contains a rather troubling torture scene. But these are ultimately small concerns when placed in the context of what is surely the most outstanding, exhilarating and multilayered open-world game ever.

The Los Santos (Rockstar's analogue of Los Angeles) of *GTA V* is so breathtakingly immense, so full of possibilities and diversions that it's almost impossible to know where to start when discussing the game. Suffice to say that the story once again puts you on the wrong side of the law – only this time you get three protagonists to play, with the ability to switch between them adding new avenues of play during missions. This last element really comes into its own during the multi-stage heists, which prove to be the high point of the game.

Not only is *GTA V* a towering achievement in gameplay terms, it also marks the franchise's pinnacle in AV terms. While there have been more graphically sophisticated titles in this console generation, none of them have attempted to do anything on a similar scale to what Rockstar has achieved here. Top-notch audio has always been one of the hallmarks of the series and *GTA V* excels again in this regard thanks to its faultless voice-acting and brilliantly varied music.



### PES 2014

Konami → Xbox 360/PS3/PC → £45 Approx



*Pro Evolution Soccer* returns in 2014 hoping to knock the *FIFA*... series of football sims off its perch. Whether or not you think it's succeeded will probably depend on your personal tastes.

In *PES 2014*'s favour, it offers a spectacularly slick gameplay experience. Konami has called upon a whole new engine, claiming

it to be the 'most comprehensive advance for the PES range since its inception' back in 2001, and the result is fluid football, with swift passing and plenty of scope for player tricks – although it is still slower in pace than *FIFA*'s rendition. New features include

Heart, which aims to replicate how a crowd of supporters can influence a team's performance and makes away games a trickier experience. Everything can take a while to get used to, but as with real sport, practice makes perfect. Or, at least, stops you losing every match.

Visually, too, *PES 2014* is a cracker. The new FOX engine delivers textured, sharp HD images, with players instantly recognisable and moving with grace. We've not seen a better-looking footy title.

However, the big drawback of the *PES* franchise remains – it's under-licensed, meaning you have to play as Merseyside Red rather than Liverpool, for instance. This should be a minor thing, but proves continually irritating.



### Hannibal: The Complete Season One

StudioCanal → Region B BD  
£30 Approx



Set prior to Thomas Harris' novel *Red Dragon*, this exceedingly gruesome and equally stylish police procedural follows the early relationship between 'troubled' FBI

special investigator Will Graham (Hugh Dancy) and consulting psychiatrist-cum-cannibal Hannibal Lecter (Mads Mikkelsen). This hi-def set's AVC 1.78:1 1080p encodes excel at capturing the show's eye-catching visuals and the DTS-HD MA 5.1 audio is superbly nuanced. Extras, however, are virtually nonexistent.



### Arrow: The Complete First Season

Warner Home Video → All-region BD  
£35 Approx



Owing more to Chris Nolan's *Dark Knight* trilogy than TV predecessor *Smallville*, this DC superhero series gives Green Arrow a grim 'n' gritty makeover. While the convoluted plotting

and an overabundant supporting cast hints that the production team weren't entirely sure of the show's direction to begin with, *Arrow* finally hits its stride in the build up to the season finale – making us believe that it could still hit the bullseye in the future. As you'd expect, the AVC 1.78:1 1080p encodes are as sharp as an arrowhead and the DTS-HD MA 5.1 is enjoyably robust.



### Revolution: The Complete First Season

Warner Home Video → All-region BD  
£35 Approx



It may be produced by the folks behind TV hits *Supernatural*, *Lost* and *Person of Interest*, but this post-apocalyptic series set in a US starved of electricity is so clean-cut, so contrived and

so formulaic that it's hard to imagine it having anything like the impact of those shows. Not that this has stopped Warner from delivering an impressive hi-def package, loaded with colour-saturated AVC 1.78:1 1080p visuals, assertive (if slightly hollow) DTS-HD MA 5.1 sonics and a solid batch of bonus goodies.







Gatsby dreamed of a world where all furniture would be made out of cushions

# Destined for Blu-ray greatness?

Baz Luhrmann's 3D adaptation reveals its true strength as a home cinema demo disc

## → THE GREAT GATSBY 3D

Baz Luhrmann was asking for trouble when he decided to throw his hat in the ring as the latest filmmaker to try and adapt F. Scott Fitzgerald's literary, but rather short, classic for the big screen. Could a director best known for showmanship and emotions writ large really get to grips with the poetry and nuances of Fitzgerald's Jazz Age cautionary tale?

For the most part he succeeds. The cast (particularly DiCaprio as Gatsby) is exceptional and the lavish staging absolutely captures the soulless extravagance at the heart of Fitzgerald's story. Yet Luhrmann's 'theatrical' handling of the material also serves to keep viewers removed from the emotional core of the characters, skimming over the surface.

**Picture:** *The Great Gatsby*? Pah! It's more like *The Flippin' Spectacular Gatsby* when it comes to this 3D Blu-ray's sumptuous stereoscopic visuals.

As the lattice of golden-hued metal in the film's Art Deco opening titles starts to extend back into the screen, the disc's MVC 2.40:1 1080p 3D encode draws you into the heart of Luhrmann's opulent vision of the 1920s. Rarely does a scene go by that doesn't make some eye-catching use of the format, layering images and text across one another.

Both presentations of *The Great Gatsby* (the 'flat' AVC 2.40:1 1080p version gets its own platter in the set) work hard to reproduce the film's faux two-strip-Technicolor aesthetics. To this end, pinks and blues are pushed up in the palette, which tends to give the



cast a fairly ruddy complexion. However, this isn't done to the detriment of the rest of the palette or the limitless depth of the blacks on show. An absolute stonker.

**Audio:** Both Blu-ray presentations of the film feature the same DTS-HD MA 5.1 mix – and it sounds fantastic.

*The Great Gatsby*'s blend of '20s music and contemporary hip hop (courtesy of megastar Jay-Z) might not suit everyone, but Warner's Blu-ray recreates this musical mashup astutely in your home, with pulsating beats and insistent instrumentation. And when the soundstage isn't awash with music, its superbly deployed to bring the film's East Coast locations to life.

Against all of this, you might expect some dialogue to get lost in the aural maelstrom. But the soundtrack's tight control of the entire soundstage ensures that dialogue is prioritised at all times and remains intelligible.

**Extras:** In the absence of a commentary track it falls to 11 featurettes to explore the making of the film.

Five of these (collected together under *Gatsby Revealed*) focus on the making of key scenes. The other six deal with the origins of the project, Tobey Maguire's on-set videos, the music, the fashion, a look back at the 'roaring 20s' and how the challenge of bringing Fitzgerald's writing to the screen inspired the film's stereoscopic 'visual poetry'.

Also included are four deleted scenes and a trailer for a lost 1926 film adaptation of the book. Overall, it's a middling selection.



The Blu-ray's 16-minute *Razzle Dazzle* featurette looks at the film's costumes



## HCC VERDICT

### The Great Gatsby 3D

→ Warner Home Video

→ All-region BD → £28 Approx

**WE SAY:** Baz Luhrmann's *Gatsby* truly is 'great' – at least as far as picture and sound quality are concerned

Movie ★★★★★

Picture ★★★★★

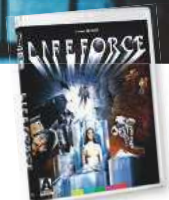
Audio ★★★★★

Extras ★★★★★

Overall ★★★★★



Tanning salons went through a curious Gothic phase in the mid-'80s



# The naked and the living dead

Tobe Hooper's sexy sci-fi-horror hybrid gets surprisingly spectacular treatment on Blu-ray...

## → **LIFEFORCE**

A box office flop in the Summer of 1985, Tobe Hooper's \$25million sci-fi-horror epic has since been relegated to the status of a 'guilty pleasure', mainly remembered for leading lady Mathilda May's many nude scenes. However, time has been surprisingly kind to the film and – while not without its flaws – today *Lifeforce* stands out from the bland Hollywood blockbusters that followed in its wake as a unique, astonishingly audacious and brilliantly bonkers special effects extravaganza.

During the investigation of a mysterious spaceship hidden in the corona of Haley's Comet, astronauts are shocked to discover three naked humanoids – two males and one female – in a state of perfect preservation. Unsurprisingly, the trio aren't quite what they seem, and it isn't long before a gorgeous female space vampire is on the loose in London, sucking the lifeforce out of her all-too-willing victims and leaving a rabid army of vampire-zombies in her wake.

While this sounds like a standard piece of exploitation cinema, *Lifeforce* is much more than that. With a budget \$6million larger than the same year's *Back to the Future* and featuring special effects by *Star Wars* alumnus John Dykstra, *Lifeforce* is really the world's weirdest blockbuster this side of *Howard the Duck*. And unlike that flop, Hooper's sci-fi-horror also has a coherent plot to keep you watching between all of the state-of-the-art special effects sequences.

**Picture:** Arrow's Blu-ray treatment of *Lifeforce* is nothing less than gorgeous. Overseen and personally colour-timed by Hooper himself, the AVC 2.40:1 1080p restoration boasts excellent colour saturation (particularly the striking red and green primaries) and impressive definition.

A thin layer of natural film grain is also present across most scenes, although it understandably makes its presence felt a little more readily during some night sequences and the film's many optical effects. The latter also make the image appear a little soft on occasions, but this is an unavoidable side-effect of the techniques being used.

**Audio:** The film (in both incarnations – see below) is accompanied by LPCM stereo and DTS-HD MA 5.1 soundtracks. The former is the more authentic of the two and delivers a satisfying aural balance across the two-channel soundstage. The 5.1 remix makes emphatic use of the surrounds, particularly when people are having their lifeforce drained, but may sound a little too processed for your tastes.

**Extras:** This two-disc set is packed with goodies. Alongside the 116-minute International Cut of the film, the first platter also hosts a trio of chat tracks with director Tobe Hooper, make-up effects designer Nick Maley and visual effects maestro Douglas Smith; a new 70-minute retrospective documentary; interviews with Hooper and actors Mathilda May and Steve Railsback; and a pair of theatrical trailers.

The second disc houses the truncated 101-minute US theatrical cut, presented with the same AV specs as the International Cut.



### HCC VERDICT

**Lifeforce**  
→ Arrow Video → Region B BD  
→ £25 Approx

**WE SAY:** Arrow has done it again with its hi-def celebration of Tobe Hooper's schlocky sci-fi-horror spectacular

**Movie** ★★★★★

**Picture** ★★★★★

**Audio** ★★★★★

**Extras** ★★★★★

**Overall** ★★★★★



## Squirm

Arrow Video → Region B BD/R2 DVD  
£23 Approx



This deliberately goofy 1976 revenge-of-nature flick posits what would happen if millions of worms suddenly

developed a taste for human flesh. While the result isn't quite as grisly as you might expect, writer-director Jeff Lieberman's *Squirm* still delivers an enjoyable blend of knowing wit and wriggly chills. Fans of the film will find plenty to enjoy about Arrow's Dual Format BD/DVD release, not least the clarity of the hi-def platter's AVC 1.85:1 1080p encode and LPCM dual-mono mix. Solid extras include an anecdote-packed chat-track by the director and a discussion of the film by critic Kim Newman.



## The Last Exorcism: Part II

StudioCanal → Region B BD  
£23 Approx



This oxymoronic sequel ditches the found footage approach of *The Last Exorcism* in

favour of a traditional cinematic style as it follows Nell (Ashley Bell) battling her demons – both psychological and literal – in New Orleans. Unfortunately this shift in style can't disguise just how dull and scare-free this film actually is. The Blu-ray itself fares fairly well with detailed AVC 2.40:1 1080p visuals and suitably histrionic DTS-HD MA 5.1 audio – although the extras (four promo featurettes) are as inconsequential as the film they support.



## Byzantium

StudioCanal → Region B BD  
£23 Approx



It may not have the star power of his previous foray into the genre (1994's *Interview with the Vampire*),

but director Neil Jordan's latest film is a similarly thoughtful take on the undead. Gemma Arterton and Saoirse Ronan are superb as the vampiric duo haunting a run-down coastal resort, themselves haunted by the past. Jordan's stylish and smart film is well served on BD by a richly-saturated AVC 2.40:1 1080p encode (although the colour timing does result in some flat black levels) and an atmospheric DTS-HD MA 5.1 mix. Extras include an hour of interviews and a Q&A.



## Creepshow

Second Sight → Region B BD  
£20 Approx



Having always had a soft spot for Stephen King and George Romero's 1982 horror anthology, we're

delighted to see that Second Sight has pulled out all of the stops for this Blu-ray outing. While the AVC 1080p encode has been re-framed slightly from the original 1.85:1 to 1.78:1, the difference is negligible. Grain is less pronounced than expected, but any digital tampering in this regard hasn't had a serious impact on the detail and sharpness of the image. Bountiful bonuses include two chat-tracks (one is more a series of interviews), a feature-length documentary and deleted scenes.



# 'Everybody in the whole cell block...'

The popular zombie series hits new heights with the addition of a little jailhouse shock

## → THE WALKING DEAD: THE COMPLETE THIRD SEASON

Rick (Andrew Lincoln) and his band of survivors decide to set up home in an abandoned prison, but after crossing paths with 'The Governor' (David Morrissey), they soon learn that the living can be even more dangerous than the (un)dead...

This third season of the hit comic book adaptation sees *The Walking Dead* evolve into a relentlessly dark yet brilliantly addictive and totally convincing piece of survival horror. And while the odd narrative misstep still holds the show back from perfection, when viewed in quick succession (rather than on a week-by-week basis) the entire run holds together extremely well, and its sheer unpredictability and chutzpah make any flaws easy to overlook.

**Picture:** Shot entirely on 16mm for a grittier, somewhat vérité aesthetic, *The Walking Dead*'s distinctive visual style is perfectly replicated by this set's AVC 1.78:1 1080p encodes. Grain is finely resolved and looks very natural, black levels are impeccable and the amount of fine detail on show regularly impresses.

Admittedly, there are some source-related issues, such as the softness witnessed in some shots and light banding on a handful of occasions. But overall this remains an authentic hi-def presentation, and one that makes amends for the lacklustre treatment the second season received on Blu-ray in the UK.

**Audio:** *The Walking Dead* boasts one of the most enveloping and atmospheric soundtracks of any TV show, so it's no surprise to discover that this set's DTS-HD MA 5.1 tracks are an audiophile's delight.



### HCC VERDICT

**The Walking Dead: The Complete Third Season**

→ EntertainmentOne  
→ Region B BD → £45 Approx

**WE SAY:** The show's best season to date gets an excellent Blu-ray release

**Movie** ★★★★★

**Picture** ★★★★★

**Audio** ★★★★★

**Extras** ★★★★★

**Overall** ★★★★★



One Direction unveil a new 'hardcore' look

The constant use of the surrounds helps make the onscreen action feel much bigger in scope than the budget can necessarily afford to show us. At the same time, the clarity of the audio and an expansive dynamic range gives it a greater sense of precision and potency than you might expect from a TV series.

Only the lack of the 7.1 tracks that appeared on the US Blu-ray hold this boxset back from scoring five-out-of-five in this category.

**Extras:** The bulk of the special features gathered together by EntertainmentOne appear on the set's fifth Blu-ray platter and take the form of six (fairly inconsequential) deleted scenes and eight behind-the-scenes featurettes exploring the show's characters (old, new and dead), visual effects and the shooting of certain key scenes.

Spread across the other discs are five informative episode-specific commentaries featuring various combinations of the show's cast and crew.



# Disney's marvellous mermaid

'Look at this Blu-ray. Isn't it neat? Without it your collection just isn't complete...'

## → THE LITTLE MERMAID: DIAMOND EDITION

It's impossible to overstate just how important 1989's *The Little Mermaid* was to Disney. More than just a return to the world of fairy tale adaptations after a gap of 30 years, the film also transformed the studio's fortunes, bringing to an end its decade-long run of critical and commercial disappointments.

While the film's gender politics can (and have) been debated endlessly, at the end of the day this screen version of Hans Christian Andersen's aquatic adventure is a resounding success. Packed to the gills with memorable characters and catchy songs, it's Disney's best animated feature since 1967's *The Jungle Book*.

**Picture:** Disney has worked its restoration magic yet again with this movie, the last of the studio's traditional hand-painted animated features. The AVC 1.78:1 1080p imagery is flawless in its clarity and vibrant in its colour saturation – the oceans look lush enough to swim in. Time to throw away your DVD copy.

**Audio:** This is the latest Disney classic to be given a DTS-HD MA 7.1-channel remix for its Blu-ray debut. And, as usual, the mix prioritises dialogue and music presentation over dynamic effects. That said, scenes such as Chapter 9's shipwreck clearly benefit from the expanded soundstage and positional cues. Good, but not outstanding.

**Extras:** As with Disney's previous Diamond Edition Blu-rays, *The Little Mermaid* comes loaded with



Sebastian rarely let Ariel play with his toys as he was a little shellfish...



special features – both old and new. The latter extras take the form of archival footage of a staff 'lecture' by lyricist Howard Ashman; a featurette about the use of

live-action reference footage; another piece about how the film influenced the current generation of Disney animators; a promo for the New Fantasyland attractions at DisneyWorld; and a Carly Rae Jepsen *Part of Your World* music video.

Repurposed DVD extras are far too many to list in full here. Highlights include a commentary by the directors and composer, deleted scenes, 46-minute *Making of...* doc and the inclusion of the *Little Match Girl* animated short, which – unlike the other archival extras – is now presented in 1080p.

## HCC VERDICT

### The Little Mermaid: Diamond Edition

→ Walt Disney Home Entertainment  
→ All-region BD → £25 Approx  
**WE SAY:** A spectacular Blu-ray that deserves to be part of your world

Movie ★★★★★

Picture ★★★★★

Audio ★★★★★

Extras ★★★★★

Overall ★★★★★

## Behind the Candelabra

EntertainmentOne → Region B BD  
£23 Approx



Made for HBO – but given a cinema release here in the UK – Steven Soderbergh's film about Liberace's secret affair with a man 40 years his junior is every bit as absurd, funny, tragic

and over-the-top as the legendary entertainer himself. Brilliant and brave performances from Michael Douglas and Matt Damon have (justifiably) received most of the acclaim, but they're supported by a suitably flamboyant production design that dazzles on this AVC 1.78:1 1080p encode of the film's digital photography. The DTS-HD MA 5.1 mix proves just as impressive, particularly when showcasing Liberace's musical performances.



## Appleseed XIII: The Complete Series

Manga → Region B BD  
£35 Approx



Masamune Shirow's sci-fi manga continues to find new life on both the big and small screen. The biggest stumbling block for this latest 13-part series is its unusual CG-animation style, which mixes Shirow's distinctive line work with bland 3D models that wouldn't look out of place in a videogame cutscene. The good news is that – outside of some minor banding – the Blu-ray's AVC 1.78:1 1080p encodes are stunning, and come accompanied by impressively dynamic Dolby TrueHD 5.1 sonics. Extras include over 143 minutes of featurettes.



## From Up on Poppy Hill

StudioCanal → Region B BD/R2 DVD  
£23 Approx



After the disappointing fantasy epic *Tales from Earthsea*, director Goro (son of Hayao) Miyazaki finds himself on much more secure ground with this intimate teenage romance. As you'd expect from a Studio Ghibli release, the hand-drawn animation is exquisite – and looks absolutely pristine on your HD display thanks to this Blu-ray's AVC 1.85:1 1080p presentation. Acoustic support is provided by a lyrical DTS-HD MA 5.0 track that focuses on the dialogue and score rather than dynamic effects. Extras include picture-in-picture storyboards, interviews and featurettes.







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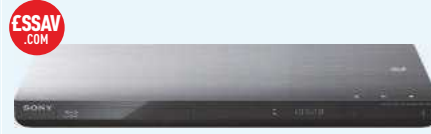


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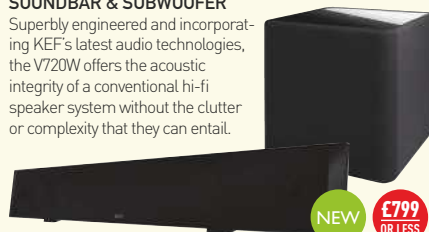
The 16 array speakers, controlled by Yamaha's YSP technology, plus two powerful woofer units in the large cabinet deliver excellent sound quality with clearly positioned dialogue and superb surround effects. The wireless subwoofer delivers clear and powerful bass.



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#### Q ACOUSTICS Q70001 SPEAKER PACKAGE

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#### REL • T-5 SUBWOOFER

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# SELECT

→ **GEAR GUIDE** **TELEVISIONS** From entry-level 40in LEDs to flagship monster plasmas  
**BLU-RAY PLAYERS** Which deck rules the roost? **PROJECTORS** It's time to blow up your video!  
**AV RECEIVERS** 5.1, 7.1, 9.2 – we've got all the options covered **SPEAKERS** Killer surround sound setups  
for all rooms and budgets **PVRs** Including super-slim Freeview boxes and Sky+HD **AND MORE!**



**NEED NEW SPEAKERS?**  
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HCC RATINGS KEY...	
Outstanding	★★★★★
Above average	★★★★☆
Acceptable	★★★☆☆
Disappointing	★★★☆☆
Dire	★★★☆☆

## TOP 10 TELEVISIONS

All prices are approx and may have changed

1 **Samsung UE55F9000** → £3,300

★★★★★

After debuting with a £35,000 85in beast, Samsung enters the 'sensible' Ultra HD TV arena with an absolute star. This neat-looking 55incher offers superb upscaling of regular HD sources and immersive active 3D. *HCC #226*

2 **Sony KDL-40W905A** → £1,400 ★★★★★

Flaunting the brand's new Triluminos edge LED lighting, this set majors on a startling colour performance, plus crisp delineation and authentic black levels. Pricey, but worth it. *HCC #222*

3 **Panasonic TX-P60ZT65** → £3,800 ★★★★★

This plasma lives up to its 'Beyond Reference' billing, with the best 1080p picture in town – imagery is effortlessly cinematic. But at this price, you might want 4K... *HCC #223*

4 **Samsung PS64F8500** → £3,000 ★★★★★

A new panel design has given Samsung's plasma tech a much needed injection of brightness and contrast. The result is a premium bigscreen display that constantly wows. *HCC #221*

5 **Samsung UE46F8000** → £1,800 ★★★★★

The F8000 tops Samsung's LED lineup (if you exclude the £35,000 S9 Ultra HD set) and is a consistently good performer. Bright, vivid images married to a super-stylish design. *HCC #221*

6 **Panasonic TX-P42GT60** → £1,150 ★★★★★

This mid-range plasma still carries much of the technology found on Panasonic's higher-end PDPs, and delivers finessed, film-friendly Full HD visuals. Not very stylish, though. *HCC #226*

7 **Sony KDL-65X9005A** → £6,000 ★★★★★

The first 'affordable' Ultra HD screen we've tested, Sony's 65in next-gen panel is a cracker, offering pin-sharp visuals and brilliant Passive 3D. Blacks aren't best-in-breed, though. *HCC #224*

8 **Philips 55PFL8008** → £2,500 ★★★★★

Philips' current flagship, this 55in sports a premium design and provides electrifying HD images. The Smart portal could be improved, however, and setup is fiddly. *HCC #224*

9 **Philips 46PFL9707** → £2,300 ★★★★★

Philips' second iteration of its Moth Eye screen technology continues to offer astonishing contrast. This set is at its best with 2D material, though: crosstalk with 3D is apparent. *HCC #216*

10 **LG 50PA650T** → £500 ★★★★★

A 50in plasma TV for £500 is hard to ignore, and this LG rewards thrifty buyers with a solid performance. No 3D or Smart tech here – just bigscreen HD images and neat styling. *HCC #219*

## TECH INFO: TELEVISIONS



**Plasma or LCD?:** The TV market is becoming increasingly dominated by LED-lit LCD screens that are much, much thinner than traditional cold cathode fluorescent lamp (CCFL) screens. For 42in and above, plasma display panels (PDPs) come into play, although LED screens up to 70ins are also hitting the high street – and 84in 4K panels are also on the way. Plasma screens generally offer superior black levels, better viewing angles and less 3D crosstalk, but less brightness and a higher energy consumption. There's also a more limited choice – with just Samsung, LG and Panasonic selling plasma TVs in the UK.



**Active or Passive:** At the beginning of the 3D revolution, most TVs featured the Active system that uses relatively expensive, powered 3D specs to deliver Full HD images to each eye. Passive 3D TVs, which are increasingly common and now sold by LG, Philips, Toshiba, Sony, and Panasonic, have a filter over the screen and use non-powered specs with polarising filters. The glasses are cheap as chips, but the resolution of Full HD 3D is halved to 540 lines horizontally (but remains at 1,920 vertically). Glasses-free 3D is in its infancy, with just Toshiba's ZL2 set currently on sale.

## TOP 5 BLU-RAY MOVIES

**G.I. Joe: Retaliation**

This sequel is a vast improvement on its predecessor, and new franchise stars Dwayne Johnson and Bruce Willis are backed up by a Blu-ray disc that sounds phenomenal and looks the part, too.

★★★★★

**Oz: The Great and Powerful**

Sam Raimi takes you back to Oz in this colour-laden fantasy that astonishes in its 3D guise. The sense of depth and immersion created here is hard to beat. Disney's 7.1 mix, meanwhile, is an absolute riot.

★★★★★

**Blow Out**

Brian de Palma's atmospheric and meticulously crafted thriller benefits from an HD restoration and a mountain of bonus material that will satiate fans. Be warned though: audio is LPCM stereo.

★★★★★

**Oblivion**

Joseph Kosinski follows up *Tron: Legacy* with another sci-fi flick that looks and sounds absolutely spectacular – so while the movie may seem a little short in terms of narrative scope, you still need to grab this disc.

★★★★★

**Iron Man 3**

This third outing for Robert Downey Jr's superhero reignites the franchise, with director Shane Black injecting some wry humour into the mayhem. What Disney's Blu-ray doesn't disappoint in AV terms either.

★★★★★



## Top 10 BLU-RAY PLAYERS

All prices are approx and may have changed

- 1**  **Oppo BDP-103EU → £500 ★★★★★**  
 Oppo's first deck for two years was worth waiting for. The universal BDP-103EU features a class-leading build and all manner of bonus goodies, including twin HDMI inputs should you want to lavish some of its processing power on lesser components. AV performance is faultless, and the onscreen menus are superb. All hail the new king of Blu! *HCC #215*
- 2**  **Sony BDP-S790 → £240 ★★★★★**  
 This range-topping deck represents a bargain AV purchase. As well as its 4K upscaling, the Sony delivers BDs and DVDs with aplomb, spins SACDs and offers twin HDMI outputs. *HCC #210*
- 3**  **Oppo BDP-105EU → £1,000 ★★★★★**  
 This heavyweight deck builds on the premium picture performance of the BDP-103EU with a wealth of audiophile upgrades – if you're serious about music, check it out. *HCC #217*
- 4**  **Marantz UD7007 → £1,000 ★★★★★**  
 Marantz's top-line player doesn't bother itself with feature fads like 4K upscaling, preferring to offer faultless BD playback, music streaming (including FLAC) and balanced outputs. *HCC #220*
- 5**  **Pioneer BDP-450 → £230 ★★★★★**  
 An affordable universal player, the BDP-450 ignores analogue outputs and concentrates solely on the digital age. Well-built and an assured performer. *HCC #219*
- 6**  **Denon DBT-3313UD → £900 ★★★★★**  
 As a 'transport', this universal deck lacks built-in decoders and analogue outs, but partner it with one of the brand's AVRs via Denon Link HD and you'll be rewarded. *HCC #217*
- 7**  **Panasonic DMP-BDT500 → £300 ★★★★★**  
 Panasonic's range-topper loves your Blu-ray collection. HD images are sharp and fluid and it doubles as a great Smart hub. The touchpad remote is a bit tricky, though. *HCC #208*
- 8**  **Sony BDP-S5100 → £140 ★★★★★**  
 Smaller than many BD decks, Sony's 'Sense of Quartz'-styled spinner offers SACD compatibility and plenty of VOD content. The menu system needs streamlining, though. *HCC #222*
- 9**  **Panasonic DMP-BDT330 → £200 ★★★★★**  
 New for 2013, this slim-line spinner is a solid choice, although the Viera Connect portal is beginning to feel a bit out-dated and the DMP-BDT500 (above) offers better features. *HCC #221*
- 10**  **Pioneer BDP-150 → £140 ★★★★★**  
 Affordable considering its Super Audio CD playback, Pioneer's BDP-150 is a worthy choice if you can live without much in the way of Smart functionality. *HCC #222*

## TECH INFO: BLU-RAY PLAYERS

**Matching your deck to your AV receiver:** Blu-ray decks are designed to deliver top-notch images (some do it much better than others, of course) but Blu-ray is also about enjoying superior quality sound. When choosing a player, bear in mind the connectivity and decoding features of your AV receiver. If you're still using an older model that doesn't offer HDMI inputs, then you'll need a Blu-ray player with multichannel analogue audio outputs to enjoy decoded hi-res surround sound formats. Similarly, older but still HDMI-equipped receivers may not be able to cope with 3D video signals, in which case you'll need a deck with dual HDMI outputs – one channeling audio to your receiver amp, the other piping video direct to your TV.

**What about the PlayStation 3?:** Sony's console ushered in the era of Blu-ray playback in 2006 and still represents an easy path to hi-def heaven. For a low-budget home cinema system, the £200 PS3 Slim (160GB) makes a decent choice – especially if you like playing games (in 3D, if you fancy it). Control via a joystick is a pain, though, and the console runs more noisily than most BD spinners. The PS4 is on the way soon, too.



## DEMO DELIGHT

**Prometheus:** Ridley Scott's return to the sci-fi genre is a treat for your senses, with a crystal-clear HD image and spine-tingling sonics. The 3D presentation of this outer-space horror is impressive too – it oozes depth and proves utterly immersive

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## TOP 10 PROJECTORS

All prices are approx  
and may have changed**Sony VPL-HW50ES** → £3,000

Another compelling example of Sony's rediscovered obsession with quality and a model that no one in the market for a mid-range projector can afford to ignore. Your film collection is in safe hands here. *HCC #216*

**JVC X55** → £5,000 ★★★★★

Armed with a more flexible, second iteration of JVC's e-shift pixel-polishing wizardry, the X55 offers supreme clarity as well as impressive contrast and near-faultless 3D presentation. *HCC #219*

**JVC X35** → £2,900 ★★★★★

The £3,000 price point is a hot spot for home cinema PJs, and JVC's 'entry-level' D-ILA model is worth auditioning – especially if you're not fussed about its '4K' scaling siblings. *HCC #218*

**Sony VPL-VW1000ES** → £17,000 ★★★★★

Sony's flagship projector is an absolute triumph, giving film fanatics the chance to upscale their Blu-ray collection to 4K resolution. The start of a new era? We hope so! *HCC #209*

**SIM2 Nero 3D-1** → £13,000 ★★★★★

That this isn't SIM2's most expensive model says a lot about the premium projector brand. Yet the DLP-based 3D-1 is still an awe-inspiring beamer, with 3D a particular strength. *HCC #206*

**JVC X75** → £6,500 ★★★★★

This offers an increased contrast over its DLA-X55 stablemate plus greater calibration options. It's a better performer, too, but whether it's worth the extra outlay is your decision. *HCC #225*

**Epson EH-TW8100** → £2,300 ★★★★★

Don't want the ISF certification, 3D glasses or wireless HD transmission of the EH-TW9100W? Then save yourself £600 and grab this well-priced offering instead. *HCC #218*

**Panasonic PT-AT6000E** → £2,900 ★★★★★

Panasonic's newest PJ is a brilliant performer with 2D, but 3D movies could do with an increase in brightness. Maybe that's why you don't get any 3D spex bundled in the box... *HCC #215*

**Optoma HD25** → £800 ★★★★★

Optoma's newest projector provides bright, stable Full HD 3D (with the Active glasses and RF transmitter included) and great-looking 2D visuals for a pittance. A bit noisy. *HCC #220*

**BenQ W1070** → £700 ★★★★★

A brilliant bargain proposition, the BenQ W1070 packs a surprising amount of useful features, including ISF certification. You'll need to fork out extra for 3D glasses, though. *HCC #220*

## TECH INFO: PROJECTORS



**Installation:** Although projectors can be temporarily placed on a cupboard, stand or shelf situated at the rear of the room (use the adjustable feet on its base to level the image so that it aligns with the screen), a much better long-term solution is to mount it on your ceiling with an appropriate bracket. Projectors can be quite heavy, though, so it's important to ensure that the bracket is attached firmly – ideally, it should be secured to a joist. Position your PJ so that an imaginary line from its lens to the opposite side of the room hits the screen exactly half-way along its width. The location of your screen should therefore dictate where your projector is. A decent tape-measure or laser pointer will help you to determine the position.

**Throw distance:** Throw distance specifies the distance between the projector and screen for a focused image of given size. As the vast majority of projectors are equipped with a zoom lens, minimum and maximum throw distances are often specified – say, 3.01m to 6.08m for a 100in. 16:9 image. Shorter throw distances are ideal for smaller rooms, and longer ones for larger rooms. Simple.

**Throw ratio:** Sometimes, a manufacturer will quote a throw ratio rather than a throw distance. This is basically the throw distance divided by the image width. To get the projected image size, divide the distance between projector and screen by the specified figure. Once again, the inclusion of a zoom lens means that upper and lower figures are usually specified.

## Bedroom TV - comfortable at last

Modern TVs have become light enough to be installed in your bedroom, according to the rules of ergonomics:

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## Top 10 SPEAKERS

All prices are approx  
and may have changed**KEF R Series 7.1** → £6,500

A 7.1 array mixing both dipolar and direct radiating surrounds, this authoritative package takes its cues from KEF's Blade concept speaker and offers faultless, largescale, home cinema sonics. HCC #217

**Bowers & Wilkins MT-60D** → £2,000 ★★★★★

This 5.1 set sits at the upper end of the sub/sat market, but buyers are rewarded by a potent performance, with the PVID subwoofer dazzling in particular. They look lovely, too. HCC #212

**Q Acoustics Q2000i** → £600 ★★★★★

Another superior sub/sat array from the sonic wizards at Q Acoustics, this marries some surprisingly full-bodied satellite speakers to an easy-to-accommodate 2 x 6in sub. HCC #211

**Wharfedale Diamond 100 HCP** → £950 ★★★★★

Yet another excellent affordable package from Wharfedale, the Diamond 100 HCP offers a sound quality beyond what you might expect from its sub-£1,000 ticket. Maturely styled. HCC #224

**M&K Sound S150 MkII** → £7,150 ★★★★★

A no-nonsense 5.1 package with Hollywood heritage and THX Ultra2 certification, this is all about uncoloured, deeply detailed audio rather than flashy aesthetics. HCC #225

**Acoustic Energy 3 Series 5.1** → £2,000 ★★★★★

An easy-to-accommodate system using bookshelves both front and rear, this brilliantly built array creates a musical, cohesive soundfield backed up by an agile subwoofer. HCC #220

**DALI Epicon 5.1** → £17,000 ★★★★★

Not a cheap option, but buyers of this DALI package are rewarded by a sublime performance. Music and movies benefit from high-end proprietary tech; build quality is fantastic. HCC #222

**Tannoy Precision Series 5.1** → £4,450 ★★★★★

These speakers' classic look belies the brand's hi-fi heritage, but this multichannel setup works wonders with movies, too – a rich, large and dynamic sound is on offer. HCC #226

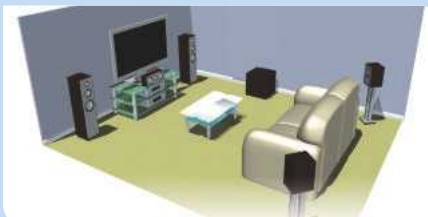
**Monitor Audio MASS 5.1** → £800 ★★★★★

Five satellite speakers joined by a potent (and quite large) 220W subwoofer, MA's MASS 5.1 delivers detailed surround sonics and enough grunt for regular-sized rooms. HCC #217

**KEF E305 5.1** → £900 ★★★★★

The living room-friendly looks of KEF's newest set of 'eggs' will ensure they get a lot of fans, and sound quality, courtesy of the brand's Uni-Q driver array, is superb. HCC #222

## TECH INFO: SPEAKERS



**Centre speaker:** Handles most of the dialogue and onscreen effects. Should be positioned above or below the screen as close to it as possible. Of course, if you're using a projector screen, it should ideally be placed behind it.

**Front speakers:** Left and right speakers should be positioned either side of the screen, in line with the centre. Turn the speakers in slightly to face the listener if there isn't an even movement of sound across the front of the room.

**Subwoofer:** Can be positioned wherever it sounds best or can be tucked out of sight due to the non-directional nature of low-frequency signals. Be aware that close positioning in corners or next to walls can create a boomy effect.

**Surrounds:** Position alongside the listener, pointing in or slightly behind the ears for a good surround effect. The back wall is not a good position for surrounds – it is, in fact, where you should locate the sixth and seventh speakers (rears) in a traditional 7.1 array.

## DEMO DELIGHT

**Gladiator:** While it's often the low-end oomph of your sub that impresses friends and family, the high-frequency poise of your speakers is equally important, lending authenticity to the copious Foley effects that litter film soundtracks. The Colosseum fight sequence in *Gladiator*, with its clashing swords, is a perfect test for your tweeters



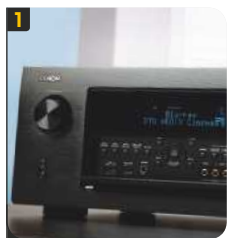
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## TOP 10 AV RECEIVERS/AV PROCESSORS/POWER AMPLIFIERS

All prices are approx and may have changed

**Denon AVR-4520** → £2,300

Denon's flagship AVR sees the brand return to the high-end in style. This 9.2-channel powerhouse mixes subtlety and detailing with brute force and dynamism. Build quality is high and its networking talents impressive. *HCC #218*

**Sony STR-DA5800ES** → £2,200 ★★★★★

Sony's follow up to the STR-DA5700ES continues to pack handy features (built-in Ethernet switching, VOD), ups the channels to 9.2, and brings a suite of great post-processing modes. *HCC #223*

**Arcam AVR750** → £4,000 ★★★★★

If all you want from an AV receiver is vast power and effortless performance, this high-end 7.1-channel beast is tailored to you. Little bonus features beyond audio networking. *HCC #225*

**Krell Foundation** → £6,500 ★★★★★

One of the US marque's more affordable offerings, the Foundation is a seven-channel processor that delivers an insightful, smooth and epic sound. And it looks fab. *HCC #224*

**Marantz AV8801** → £2,500 ★★★★★

The brand's high-end 11-channel processor offers balanced outputs and heavyweight engineering. Partner it with the MM8807 power amp for a supreme performance. *HCC #220*

**Pioneer SC-LX86** → £2,000 ★★★★★

As the Japanese corp's top dog, the SC-LX86 is packed with features and built to last. Get to grips with its detailed setup process and you're in for multichannel thrills. *HCC #217*

**Onkyo TX-NR626** → £400 ★★★★★

Packing both Bluetooth and Wi-Fi (without the need for optional dongles) means this affordable Onkyo is ideal for network audio. Multichannel delivery is energetic, if a little brash. *HCC #226*

**Denon AVR-X4000** → £1,200 ★★★★★

A revamped GUI makes the AVR-X4000 pretty on the eye, but it's still not a fool-proof user experience. Sonically it's assured and the media streaming side is hard to fault. *HCC #226*

**Harman Kardon AVR 370** → £800 ★★★★★

One of the most sultry-looking models on the market, HK's mid-ranger offers 8-in, 2-out HDMI hookup, AirPlay and a classy audio performance. The app and UI could be better. *HCC #219*

**Yamaha RX-V675** → £500 ★★★★★

The new low/mid-range RX-V675 digs out all the sonic details of your Blu-ray platters and places them across the soundstage. A great-sounding AVR at a good price. Primitive UI. *HCC #225*

## TECH INFO: AV RECEIVERS



**Tackling new heights:** You may find your AV receiver offering Dolby Pro-Logic IIz, Audyssey DSX or DTS Neo: X post-processing – possibly all three. All of these can deliver two further Front Height channels, with the aim of adding height and control to the front soundstage, particularly in terms of lifting the centre channel and adding scale to vertical surround effects – rainfall for example. The catch is that you will need to add two new physical speakers, mounted near your ceiling above the regular left and right channel cabinets, and make use of two of the receiver's channels of amplification, which could mean forgoing a second stereo zone or rear surrounds speakers. Note that the Audyssey and DTS modes also cater for Front Wide speakers (pictured above), but this idea seems to be gaining less traction within the industry.

**How much power?:** Many of the mass-market AV receiver manufacturers are involved in a specifications race to see who can say their model is the most powerful, which can be confusing for consumers. For instance, both Krell's £7,000 S-1500 seven-channel power amp and Yamaha's £500 RX-V671 both claim 7 x 150W – the important part is that Krell's figure is into an eight-Ohm load with all channels driven, and that Yamaha's is with one channel into a four-Ohm load, which is hardly a real-world situation. The best advice is ignore the numbers game and get a demo of your desired AVR with the same, or similar, speakers that you intend to partner it with.



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# Top 10 SUBWOOFERS

All prices are approx  
& may have changed



## 1 Bowers & Wilkins DB1 → £3,250

★★★★★

Featuring a bipolar arrangement of 12in drivers powered by 1,000W of amplification, B&W's stylish flagship sub is a faultless performer, offering both musicality and sheer muscle. Fit to partner the finest of speakers. HCC #197



## 2 JL Audio Fathom F212 → £5,900 ★★★★★

The US brand arrives in the UK in style – this 2 x 12in, 3,000W brute not only looks gorgeous, it's capable of a mindblowing performance. Got a big room? Get one of these! HCC #214



## 3 Tannoy TS2.12 → £550 ★★★★★

The TS2.12 is easily Tannoy's best woofer yet – using a 12in driver (opposite a passive 12in cone) and 500W amp to deliver a rich, bass performance. Affordable and good-looking, too. HCC #208



## 4 Velodyne SPL-800 Ultra → £1,150 ★★★★★

Proof that even 'small' subwoofers can offer a brilliant performance. The 8in driver is helped by a 1,200W amp and mic-assisted room EQ. Tight and fast. HCC #201



## 5 REL Acoustics T-7 → £650 ★★★★★

The T-7 uses an 8in driver in tandem with a 10in passive radiator, and features simultaneous speaker-level and LFE inputs and Class A/B amplification. An excellent all-rounder. HCC #223



## 6 Bowers & Wilkins PVID → £1,200 ★★★★★

On of the coolest-looking subs on the planet, B&W's revamped PVI uses DSP trickery to craft an opulent low-end performance. The touch-sensitive OLED display is pure class. HCC #212



## 7 Velodyne DD18+ → £5,800 ★★★★★

If you have a large cinema room then this second-gen 18in beast from Velodyne will appeal. The performance is as brilliant as you'd expect for the price and specification. HCC #197



## 8 REL G1 → £3,300 ★★★★★

A top-of-the range woofer with a price tag to match, buyers of REL's G1 can rest assured they're getting a best-in-breed product. Delivers a warm, rich sound with slam and depth. HCC #208



## 9 SVS SB12-NSD → £650 ★★★★★

A 12in driver squeezed into the smallest enclosure possible, the SB12-NSD packs a 400W 'Sledge' amp and offers a weighty yet fast and accurate sound. Looks a bit bland, though. HCC #223



## 10 Quadral Qube 10 → £525 ★★★★★

A gorgeous-looking woofer with a build quality that belies its lowly price tag, the Qube 10 takes Quadral's musical heritage and delivers a controlled, poised performance. HCC #223

## TECH INFO



**Why use more than one sub?:** Using two subwoofers (or perhaps four) should, in theory, bring huge rewards in terms of bass performance. But remember that LFE is a tricky beast to control. Running two subs may simply double problems in your room like room boom and suck-outs, where outgoing and reflected bass sounds cancel each other out. If you have some flexibility in where you place subwoofers, trial and error may well throw up some interesting results. The acoustics wizard Floyd E Toole (his book *Sound Reproduction: The Acoustics and Psychoacoustics of Loudspeakers and Rooms* is fine bedtime reading) suggests one LFE sub to either side of the room may be best for accuracy while placing them in the front corners would be best for overall bass power. Yet there is no hard and fast rule as to what will work best for every room, and you may find that simply using one (large) subwoofer is preferable as it's the easiest to get sounding right.

## DEMO DELIGHT

**Jurassic Park:** Steven Spielberg's dinosaur-packed blockbuster is rightly remembered for its cutting-edge CGI, but the surround sound mix is equally impressive. The Blu-ray release provides a perfect test for your subwoofer, with the ominous footfalls of the T-Rex so loud and low in the mix that you should find yourself as terrified as Jeff Goldblum's fast-talking mathematician. If you don't – well, you need a new woofer.

# Top 5 HD GAMES



## Injustice: Gods Among Us

A beat 'em up incorporating a bevy of DC Comics characters (Superman, Batman, Wonder Woman *et al*) sounds like a great idea – and it is. Accessible to novices and suprisingly fun in the single-player mode. Pow!

★★★★★



## Grid 2

Codemasters' sequel is the king of arcade racers, with the souped-up cars handling like a dream and the opposition's AI ensuring victories are well-earned. Photo-realistic vehicles and environments dazzle.

★★★★★



## BioShock Infinite

Irrational Games' sequel is a corker, offering a perfect mix of classy visuals, an engrossing narrative and, above all, superb gameplay. Start roaming the floating city of Columbia and you won't want to stop.

★★★★★



## Dishonored

This first-person action-adventure puts you in the body of an assassin in a beautifully crafted steampunk world. Convincing characters and great sound design partnered with involving gameplay. We love it.

★★★★★













## Tomb Raider

Lara Croft returns in this fantastic reboot that breathes new life into the third-person action genre. With a great story and quality graphics and sonic design it feels like a Hollywood blockbuster. Just with a joypad.

★★★★★

## TOP 10 ACCESSORIES

All prices are approx and may have changed

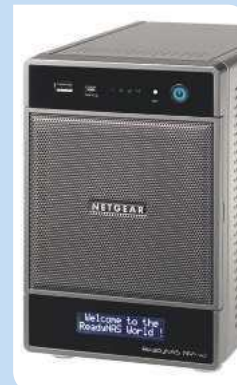
- 1**  **Now TV box → £10 ★★★★★**  
 An unqualified bargain, this Wi-Fi VOD streamer from Sky (and built upon Roku hardware) brings BBC iPlayer, Demand 5 and the Roku Channel Store to any HDMI-toting telly, plus subscription access to Sky Movies and Sky Sports. The quality of the adaptive bitrate streaming is impressive, and the £10 tag gets you P&P and an HDMI cable. *HCC #226*
- 2**  **Devolo dLAN 500 AV Wireless+ → £130 ★★★★★**  
 Combining Powerline Ethernet distribution with integrated Wi-Fi, this starter kit is a great purchase if you're looking to extend and simplify your home network. *HCC #222*
- 3**  **Western Digital WD TV Live Hub → £200 ★★★★★**  
 The WD's 1TB hard drive explains the £200 ticket. This sleek-looking unit incorporates a faultless user interface and smartphone control, making media browsing a breeze. *HCC #190*
- 4**  **PSB M4U1 → £220 ★★★★★**  
 These closed-back 'phones are excellent all-rounders – agile and clear with music, while possessing enough low-frequency prowess to give weight to BD soundtracks. Comfy, too. *HCC #221*
- 5**  **Crystal Acoustics Media Matchbox → £55 ★★★★★**  
 A dinky media player that will happily play nearly everything you throw at it, including MKV, FLAC and BD/DVD ISO files. Pocket-sized, wallet-friendly and fuss free. *HCC #202*
- 6**  **Philips Hue → £180 ★★★★★**  
 These Wi-Fi enabled lightbulbs might be expensive (this £180 starter pack includes two, plus the Wi-Fi bridge) but making your own multicoloured lighting scheme is a blast. *HCC #220*
- 7**  **One For All Simple 4 → £22 ★★★★★**  
 A neatly styled and backlit universal remote control, One For All's budget zapper can tackle up to four devices at once and offers easy setup and handy shortcut keys. *HCC #220*
- 8**  **Bang & Olufsen Beolit 12 → £600 ★★★★★**  
 Pricy for an AirPlay speaker, but the performance and rugged build of B&O's semi-portable Beolit 12 justify the outlay; the onboard 120W amp delivers the goods. *HCC #224*
- 9**  **DVDO Air → £350 ★★★★★**  
 Built around the WiDi standard, this wireless HD sender handles Full HD (including 3D) video and multichannel audio. Build quality and design is good, performance hard to fault. *HCC #214*
- 10**  **Corsair Voyager Air → £180 ★★★★★**  
 A Wi-Fi-enabled portable hard drive (1TB), also with Ethernet, the smart-looking Voyager Air is an ideal partner for 'phone/tablet users. No DLNA media server on board, though. *HCC #223*

## TECH INFO: MEDIA PLAYERS



**What about my TV?:** Many flatscreen TVs from the major brands (Sony, Samsung, Panasonic, LG, Toshiba and Sharp) also incorporate media player functionality, using Ethernet or Wi-Fi to stream from your home network, or from plugged-in USB drives. Most modern Blu-ray players offer this, too. However, file support is rarely as extensive as on dedicated devices from the likes of Western Digital and A.C. Ryan, and our experience shows some are more adept at playback from USB than over a network. Nor (obviously) is a TV or BD player portable. If your media collection extends beyond JPEGs and MP3s into lossless audio rips and esoteric HD video formats, then a standalone player is a good investment.

**Storage:** You can, if you really want, store all your files on a plethora of USB drives, or on your PC, but it's best to get a NAS (Network Attached Storage) device for simplified sharing of your media across a network with multiple players, such as one from Netgear's ReadyNAS range (pictured). These dedicated devices often offer RAID array file backup, and are managed via browser software. Storage capacity can be anything from 1TB to 12TB and beyond.



## TOP 5 BLU-RAY BOX SETS

**Game of Thrones: The Complete Second Season**

Another ten episodes of prime fantasy TV gets a spectacular Blu-ray release courtesy of HBO Home Entertainment – the picture and sound quality consistently impresses.

★★★★★

**Indiana Jones: The Complete Adventures**

Although the *Raiders of the Lost Ark* restoration isn't the best we've seen, this is a box set that no home cinema fan can afford to be without. And ...*Temple of Doom* is uncut, too!

★★★★★

**Universal Classic Monsters: The Essential Collection**

Bag yourself eight great monster movies given a thorough cleanup by Universal Studios – and marvel at the sheer brilliance of *The Creature from the Black Lagoon* in 3D.

★★★★★

**Boardwalk Empire: Season Three**

An interview with producer Martin Scorsese, plus commentary tracks and interactive viewing mode, round out a great-looking five-disc set for HBO's addictive crime drama.

★★★★★

**The Lord of the Rings Trilogy: Extended Edition**

Peter Jackson's box office-breaking trilogy simply dazzles in HD, and these extended cuts are perfect for Middle-earth maniacs. Watch the movies then savour the 26 hours of extras.

★★★★★



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## TOP 5 PVRs

**Virgin Media TiVo, £subscription**

This triple-tuner PVR offers ultimate recording flexibility, useful features – you can undelete deleted shows! – and awesome TiVo functionality. A no brainer if you're in a cable area

★★★★★

**Sky+HD, £subscription**

Sky's channel choice is second-to-none and its twin tuner 2TB PVR is a perfect partner. The recent EPG tweak is welcome and Anytime (the push VOD service) is brilliant for catching up on new movies

★★★★★

**Panasonic DMR-HW220, £250**

Panasonic's PVR mixes a 1TB hard drive with its Smart Viera functionality and media streaming – so at £250 it's an absolute steal, regardless of the uninspired design

★★★★★

**Pure Avalon 300R Connect, 1TB, £350**

Pure's debut Freeview+ HD offering is assured. While it can't match YouView for VOD content, the user interface here is unrivalled and four-way HDMI switching a welcome addition

★★★★★

**Samsung BD-F8500, £300**

This 500GB model marries its Freeview+ PVR to a Wi-Fi-toting 3D Blu-ray player and offers copious catch-up TV options – it's just a shame they aren't integrated into the EPG environment

★★★★★

## TOP 5 SOUNDBARS

**Yamaha YSP-3300, £900**

A slender soundbar/sub duo that offers a very effective virtual surround performance courtesy of Yamaha's Beam driver tech. Connections include four HDMI inputs – but there's no Bluetooth here

★★★★★

**Sonos PlayBar, £600**

Sonos' debut 'bar offers a hefty, spacious sound (although it doesn't come with a sub) and it can be easily added to an existing Sonos network for music-on-demand fun. Only connects to your TV via optical

★★★★★

**Orbitsound SB60, £300**

Designed to slot underneath a TV's stand, this reasonably affordable 'bar offers a powerful, clear audio performance, but is rather old-fashioned in terms of connectivity and only suitable for screens up to 42in

★★★★★

**Philips HTL9100, £600**

A soundbar/sub that incorporates two removable side speakers to allow it to become a wireless 5.1 system, this Philips is a neat proposition. Easy to install and with a heavyweight sound

★★★★★

**Bowers & Wilkins Panorama 2, £1,650**

This second-generation soundbar offers no separate subwoofer and is hardly cheap, but B&W's audio expertise shows through, and HDMI hookup aids installation

★★★★★

## TOP 5 SYSTEMS

**Panasonic SC-BTT590, £630**

The use of new bamboo/charcoal drivers and noise-shaping tech pays dividends here, with a classy sound quality to match the wealth of features (3D BD, Smart TV and more)

★★★★★

**Samsung HT-F9750W, £1,500**

Samsung's flagship tallboy array uses a vacuum tube pre-amp and offers unique DTS Neo: Fusion seven-channel processing. Powerful, fulsome sound; packed with features

★★★★★

**Harman Kardon BDS470, £650**

Harman's 2.1 system eschews 'net TV and streaming features, but majors in heavyweight build quality and solid AV performance. We tested a 2.1 iteration – 5.1 is also available

★★★★★

**LG BH8220B, £650**

With its silver finish, this is a suitable one-box system to partner with LG's flatscreen TVs, with a commendable, if slightly lacking in HF finesse, sound. Additional features including CD-ripping to USB. Handy

★★★★★

**Panasonic SC-HTB570, £350**

A commendable slim-line 2.1 system that can also be clicked together to make a soundbar. The punchy wireless subwoofer does a lot of the work. Bluetooth music streaming is onboard

★★★★★

# HOME CINEMA

## Choice

## → IN THE NEXT ISSUE

**Mastered in 4K:** In-depth analysis of Sony's beefed-up Blu-rays  
**Oi, Santa!** Christmas gifts... for yourself  
**Samsung OLED:** World's biggest TV brand talks next-gen TV tech

## → ON TEST

**Sony VPL-VW500ES 4K projector** **Panasonic W600 4K TV** **Monitor Audio Radius 5.1 speakers**  
**Cambridge Audio Aero 5.1** **Harman Kardon Sabre SB 35 soundbar** Music streaming services roundup  
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GLOSS BLACK OR WHITE

0% FINANCE AVAILABLE  
24 MONTHS | £112 PMONTH\*

\*EXAMPLE WITH 10% DEPOSIT

WHAT IF FIT? ★★★★★  
Awards '12

PRICE **£799.00**

MONITOR AUDIO MASS 5.1  
BLACK/ALUMINIUM

0% FINANCE AVAILABLE  
12 MONTHS | £66 PMONTH\*

\*EXAMPLE WITH 10% DEPOSIT

FOUND CHEAPER? CALL US TODAY!

PRICE **£1,699**

DALI FAZON 5.1 PACKAGE  
GLOSS BLACK OR GLOSS WHITE

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# POINT OF VIEW

Never mind the violence and glorified criminality, **Richard Stevenson** is more worried about the damage that *Grand Theft Auto V* is doing to his thumb – and its average 5.1 mix

**I'M NOT MASSIVELY** into gaming, but every Quentin Tarantino fan should try *Grand Theft Auto V*. The excitement, the rhetoric, the \$170m build cost – and the spectacular headlines when it grossed over \$1bn in its first three days on sale – were enough to convince me. The build-up was like the marketing hype for *Avatar* on steroids. I went for the PlayStation 3 incarnation, because the PS3 version has an uncompressed LPCM 5.1 soundtrack while the Xbox 360 iteration is limited to Dolby Digital.

*GTA V* is a milestone in gaming history; a benchmark by which others will be judged. It is vast and crafted with a level of detail and beauty that would embarrass many of Hollywood's finest releases. It also ushers in a level of moral ambivalence that would have Mary Whitehouse not only turning in her grave but banging on the lid and demanding a ban. The gameplay and cut-scenes are packed full of extreme violence, underpinned with dark humour, satire, parody, misogyny and language that no-one's mum would approve of.

Having set the moral bar pretty low in *GTA IV*, developer Rockstar Games went all-out to get conservative Middle America (and Middle Europe and Middle Asia) about as incensed as possible with its controversial characters, plot and action. Even those familiar with the *GTA* series' gamut of blood, gore and murdering innocent bystanders will be taken aback with some of the outrageous violence in *GTA V*. In fact, **I struggle to even conceive how Rockstar could get any more naughty for *GTA VI*.**

It would be easy to criticise the violence in *GTA V*, mostly because Rockstar has crafted parts of the game specifically so that journalists do just that. However, condemning or passing judgment on the content would be no different from doing so for the

films that have pushed boundaries over the years, too. Springing immediately to mind are *Reservoir Dogs*, *Clockwork Orange*, *I Spit on Your Grave*, *Natural Born Killers* and even *Bonnie and Clyde*.

## Blockbuster gaming

From a cinematic perspective the game is right up there with some of the very best movies for pure engagement with the viewer. The scenery is epic and detailed, the characters (mostly) believable, and the action will get your adrenaline pumping. The uncompressed 5.1 sound mix is pretty good but I am not convinced a huge proportion of that \$170m development cost was lavished upon it. There are plenty of effects and audible fireworks but not quite the sonic atmosphere-building that would have made the gritty realism even more, well, gritty and real. George Lucas would have done it better.

Stepping away from the controller and finding a sticky plaster for the inevitable blister of the occasional gamer, I can reflect on the lasting impression that *GTA V* leaves with you. It's a fabulous game and worthy of the hyperbole that suggests it is the biggest and most comprehensive computer generated 'reality' yet. And with a multiplayer online version in the wings and a dedicated social network already available across smartphone platforms, it really is at the cutting-edge of multimedia tech, too.

But is the violence a step too far? Are we corrupting today's youth (it has an 18 rating but that didn't stop us watching 18-rated movies when we were in short trousers)? Will we see a degradation in the moral fabric of society? Certainly not, because the majority of people can still tell the difference between reality and its virtual equivalent ■

*Has *GTA V* pushed the boundaries of gaming too far? Let us know: email [letters@homecinemachoice.com](mailto:letters@homecinemachoice.com)*

**Richard Stevenson** has now been playing *Grand Theft Auto V* for so long that he's forgotten how the UK's traffic light system operates







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